Pro Teaching Tip: Using Job Aids in Judicial Branch Education

As Judicial Branch Educators, we are very busy people. As such, we may tend to take the easy route when thinking about materials to provide to our learners. How often have you received an unreadable copy of a power point slide deck as materials for a session? How often have you provided one for a session you taught? Taking the time to develop a simple job aid can be a big help to your learners.

We use job aids in everyday life all the time. Grocery lists, contact lists, the directions that come with a new piece of furniture to be put together, post medical procedure instructions, and gym workouts are all examples of everyday job aids.

Examples of job aids for the Judicial Branch education include:

- Step-by-step directions for a process

- A form or worksheet

- Checklists

- Decision tables

- Flowcharts

- Reference with sources

These examples have some things in common. First and foremost, they are designed to be used in the moment of need. They are concise, one to two-page documents, often in pdf format. They provide a resource for information users do not need to memorize but will need to refer to. They contain current information presented in a well-designed, easy to follow format. The designer provides a brief context (definition, illustrative title, brief overview) so the user knows exactly when to use them.

When are job aids most needed?

- When learning something for the first time. We cannot expect learners to remember the steps of a process or procedure, or the components of a statute the first time they hear about it.

- When seeking to learn more about something. Why not provide a list of resources in electronic format with a links to needed information?

- When trying to apply or remember something, such as entering cases into a case management system, creating reports from a database, following the steps in calculating child support payments.

- When attempting to solve a problem or identify where something has gone wrong. Flow charts, checklists, and decision tables can be very useful in these situations.

- When something changes that requires changes in an established process. Statutes, for example, change often. A job aid to highlight the new process necessary for a change in statute is invaluable. Ditto for following new best practices.

How do job aids help learners?

- They remove the complexity from a task. When creating a job aid, keep it simple, use action verbs, and use images when needed to illustrate a task.

- They limit errors in repetitive tasks. This is especially true when there is a change in a process that learners will need to adapt to. They can use the job aid until they have the new process memorized.

- They provide a roadmap for tasks that need to be done in a specified order. For example, a checklist for a customer service person to explain the steps for filing for divorce or obtaining court records to a customer. A checklist will guarantee that clerks provide consistent directions, and the checklist can be given to customers to follow to assist them complete the desired tasks.

- Job aids can help with consistent performance. See the bullets above.

- They decrease the time it takes to achieve competence in a task, while at the same time limiting errors and reducing waste. They provide a simple, direct, easy to access reference.

- They can provide a ready resource for reference. For example, a list of links to statutes needed to process a case, or links to specific parts of bench books, or instructional design resources. A list of action verbs grouped around Bloom's taxonomy is an example, as is a graphic with the four components of procedural fairness.

A good job aid is well-designed, using consistent and effective fonts, colors, alignment, and grouping. Typically, the designer should use plenty of white space to keep the job aid easy to use and clear. Images are great, but only if they help the learner.

Taking the time to create a job aid to accompany training is worth the effort for the educator and the learner.

References

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