

It's been said that having a little knowledge can be dangerous, and that is certainly true in ergonomics. But, when it comes to using ergonomics to your full advantage, having more knowledge can be powerful. A well-trained workforce, from managers to employees to the ergonomics team, can change your organization's ergonomics initiative from lackluster to dynamic. I'm not talking about just mentioning ergonomics during a manager's meeting or plugging in a video during an orientation session. The best and most effective training comes with some conscientious work—planning, targeted content, efficient and creative presentation, active involvement, and diligent follow-up. It sounds like a lot of work, but the results are worth the effort. All you need is a process. »

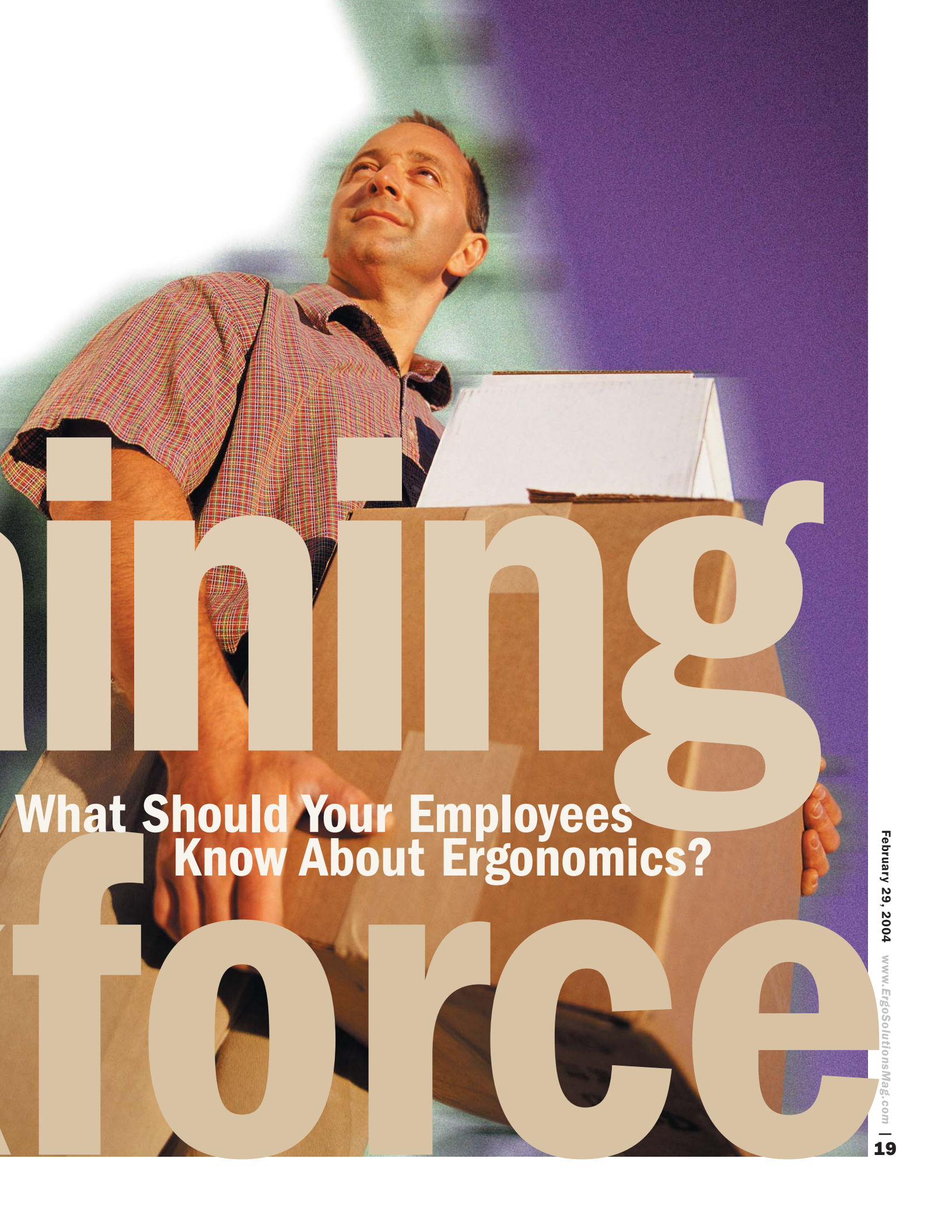
By Anita R. Goehringer, MS, CIE

Big picture planning

Now is the time to lay the foundation for your training processes. Answering a couple of questions upfront will help forge your direction. Who will be trained? What do you want each group to be able to do with their knowledge? What level of ergonomics knowledge do they currently possess? Are there obstacles to overcome to develop a successful training process? These questions can be asked generally and specifically.

For example, let's say that you want the supervisors in your organization to spot potential ergonomics problems in their work areas, work with the employees to find appropriate and workable solutions, and make sure employees who are experiencing discomfort or other signs and symptoms of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) receive proper treatment and workplace evaluation. In order for your supervisors to have a fighting chance at accomplishing these goals, more

Training with the workforce



Lifting force

What Should Your Employees Know About Ergonomics?



than the typical two hours of training annually is recommended. You know that more time, say four hours or more, would allow supervisors to work hands-on examples and gain experience and confidence with identifying solutions to key concerns, but it's going to be difficult getting all the supervisors together at once and for a longer time frame. Furthermore, the supervisors are weary of added workload and past ergonomic experiences that went awry.

In this scenario, we've identified that the direction of this training should be geared to hands-on learning. The content should be a mix of lecture and workshop exercise, the training style should be flexible—to potentially accommodate multiple shorter sessions, and some form of follow-up will be necessary to ensure supervisor understanding. Potential obstacles include gaining supervisor trust and management support, which may require some up-front discussions prior to training. An effective process can now be developed that addresses all identified requirements and possible constraints.

You'll want to work this process for all organizational training from the top down. Answer the questions and determine how each group can contribute to the ergonomics initiative, enhance their knowledge and skills, and take some of the workload off the ergonomics team leader. Address all potential challenges in your process and gain management support for your carefully crafted plan.

What do you want them to learn?

Develop or seek out content targeted to each group based on your outlined training goals. Keep in mind that everyone in the organization does not need to know the same things. For example, if one of your goals for hourly-level employee training is to make them more aware of stressors and how the individuals can help control risk of problem development, then you'll want to include examples of how they can help themselves on the job—stretches they can do periodically, good methods for performing a task, good equipment and layout arrangements to minimize awkward postures and force exertions, and so on. Minimize discussions involving issues they have no control over in their work environment. Save these topics for supervisor/ management, engineering or other group training.

Train outside the box

Effective training draws the participants' interest and engages their involvement in the process. Training does not need to be lengthy to get your points across. It doesn't even need to occur all at the same time. In fact, sometimes it's

much more effective in short, pithy segments. Be creative—there are no rules to follow for ergonomics training, just that it's effective. Give examples, do demonstrations, pull participants from the audience, build in challenges, and guide them through the process of getting what you want for your ergonomics initiative.

Stick to your training goals. Follow-up training with an ergo IQ test—for fun, that is. You'll find out, in a non-threatening way, if your training had the desired effect.

Results prove it

Education is an on-going process—you're never done. The more you reinforce your training goals and find different and better ways to communicate information and solicit participation, the more effective your ergonomics initiative becomes. Build into your process, early on, a way of tracking and measuring progress to goals. Fewer problems, innovative solutions, shared responsibility, and a well-educated team will be your proof of success. **ESM**

In the next issue...

Motivating the Team: *Finding New Ways to Solve Old Problems*

When your long-standing ergonomics team seems to have run out of energy, you need to make a course adjustment. In the next issue, find ways to breathe life back into your team, increase involvement and enthusiasm, and move your successful ergonomics initiative forward.

Anita R. Goehring, MS, CIE is an ergonomics consultant with expertise in planning and maintaining effective ergonomics initiatives. Anita can be reached at 919.676.0553 or agoehring@nc.rr.com