

The Importance of Proper Work Instructions

Written by Nick Sanders

Wednesday, 19 September 2012 00:00



It's no secret that we here at Apogee Consulting, Inc. think workforce management—especially employee development—is a critical management function. And it's no secret that we think the current leadership at most companies is taking the wrong tack on the issue. With the sequestration bogeyman looming large and baby-boomer retirements as a percentage of the workforce trending upwards, we think it's imperative for you to (a) move knowledge out of workers' heads into more permanent media, and (b) figure out how to develop your next generation of leaders.

We've posted several blog articles on the topic, some of which we thought were quite passionate. Not that they moved you to actually, you know, *do something about the situation*. But still. Writing and posting them made us feel better, at least.

We were once again reminded of the need to document the “how to” associated with various activities and functions when we came across [this recipe](#) at the Food.com.

Yes, it was a simple recipe for making ice cubes. *Ice cubes*. Who the hell needs a recipe for making ice cubes?

The recipe listed the necessary ingredients (2 cups water, 2 tablespoons water, additional water if needed) and identified the total time necessary to make ice cubes as 2 hours, 2

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minutes (2 minutes Prep Time, 2 hours Cook Time). There was even a helpful picture to show how the finished product should look (photo by Peter Quale).

The recipe itself had five steps. We repeat them here and readers may use this list for future reference.

1.

Empty the ice cubes that are left in the trays (if there are any left) into the bin.

2.

Take the trays over to the sink and fill them with cold water.

3.

Place the water filled ice trays back in the freezer.

4.

Replace the ice bin if you had to remove it.

5.

Shut the door to the freezer.

Now, of course the recipe was posted tongue-in-cheek. And the nearly 500 comments it generated were also written with tongue firmly in cheek.

But some of the comments pointed out problematic omissions in the recipe. If somebody who didn't know how to make ice cubes were to follow the recipe exactly as written, it is possible that the finished product wouldn't meet quality standards; the finished cubes might not meet spec. Read the list over and think about it. Can you spot the omissions in the work instructions?

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Yeah, you totally didn't even pause for a second, did you? You want the answers spoon-fed to you, just like everybody else. (*Spoon-fed* from the Food.com website. Get it?)

Okay, here are some comments that pointed out flaws in the work instruction.

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This recipe is horrible! Maybe I should have left them in longer than two minutes (the recipe doesn't say how long to leave them in the freezer so I just kind of guessed) but mine came out all watery. I won't be making these again.

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I'm not rating this very high. My ice cubes watered down my water, since they weren't very solid. Could you be more specific about the freeze time?

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I guess they turned out OK. I assumed, like muffins, you had to grease the pan first. They did come out nice and easy, but they made our drinks awfully greasy. Next time I will grease AND flour the pan. Anyone else have this same problem?

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This was so simple to make and absolutely delicious. I used fresh, organic water since we're both trying to lose weight. Since it didn't specify how many servings the recipe would make, I doubled the recipe and actually had enough for left-overs. I'm definitely adding it to my list of favorites.

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I wish I had found this recipe over the summer. My iced tea and lemonade were so warm. I just knew something was missing. TIP...you have to carry the tray to the freezer VERY SLOWLY so you don't spill any water. Thank you SO much for posting! My family loved it, so this one's definitely a keeper!

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This recipe was fine, once I added two steps: 1. Turn off the water after filling trays. 2. Be sure the trays are LEVEL in the freezer and there is nothing on top of the tray -- not even a corner of a frozen veggie bag! Overall, a great recipe!

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My biggest tip is to be sure you leave enough time when making the ice cubes as this cannot be rushed. It really does take two hours.

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... Second tip: this needs to be served right out of the freezer. It just won't keep otherwise. We live in Dallas and left for Texoma at about 9 for a family lunch that was served at noonish and the ice cubes were all watery when we arrived. But my family still loved it! I just think it would have been better had we been able to serve it right out of the freezer.

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Thank you so much. I had forgotten some of the details when I lost my recipe card years ago. Now we can have fresh ice cubes. I wanted to let you know a few things though. After trying the recipe a few times I decided to use a large tray instead. The purpose was to cut out some nice shapes, using cookie cutters, for my daughter's birthday party. Maybe you could help. I poured in the water just as you instructed then cut the shapes and put the tray in the freezer. When I pulled out the tray there was only 1 giant cube. What did I do wrong?

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Is this recipe available with metric measurements so it can be made in Europe?

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Thx for posting this recipe. I might try it during Christmas, but in the meantime do you have a simpler bachelor version? I just moved & am going to buy an ice tray. Where in the freezer should I put it for best results? Please help me.

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Through much trial and error, I learned to put the ice cube tray in the freezer so it is flat. Otherwise the water pours out all over everything. What a mess! Now, my big question is what do you DO with ice cubes? I tried grilling them, but they melted and fell right through. Do you have a recipe for barbecued ice cubes? I was hoping they would retain their shape.

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I can't believe all the reviews people are writing. I mean, how in the world did you people taste them? I've made two batches, but you can't pick them up with a fork or a spoon. I tried cutting them into smaller pieces, but that didn't work. Chopsticks was a complete disaster. I put them on a serving tray and we were going to try eating them as finger foods, but BRRRRRR... and they kept slipping out.

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... (On a serious note, if you want more transparent ice, start with hot water--less gas is held in hot water compared with cold water). ...

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This seems to be a good start, however mine turned out a little grey. Then I discovered, my boys needed step #1 to be, WASH YOUR HANDS. Once we made that change they turned out fine. Had to throw out that first batch but used the next batch with a bit of rum and coke and all was just fine.

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Believe it or not, ice cubes made with HOT water freeze faster than those made with cold water (something to do with the accelerating rate of cooling). They also freeze clearer, and harder. ...

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I hate to sound stupid, but I'm having trouble picking up the water and putting it in the trays. My fingers get wet, and the water just stays in the bowl. Is there some special tool all of you are using? I could also use some help with boiling water. It's been in the pan for two days on the counter, and it's STILL not boiling! What do you guys do to make it boil?

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This looked simple enough, but even after 2 hours, mine were only partially frozen. Are there any adjustments I should be making for high altitude?

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... Finally, a bit of advice- the first time I made this, they came out perfectly. I placed them on the table and went to get everyone seated, but in the 15 minutes it took to get everyone to the table, the ice cubes had turned into cold water. I was so frustrated- I mean, when I bake a chicken and let it sit for 15 minutes, I don't come back and find it has turned to broth. So, serve this right away!

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This is a phenomenal recipe. At first I had a little trouble fitting two cups into the little plastic trays but got it figured out eventually. One question though, I'm going to be doing an authentic German dinner for my inlaws and wondered, is there is a German version I can try?

Okay, okay. The foregoing is just a bit of fun being had by several awesome folks. But it underlines our point, which is: when having employees draw up work instructions that describe what they do, make sure the instructions are complete. Have other employees—who have absolutely no clue about the task being described—read the draft work instructions and ask questions. We bet you'll be amazed at the omissions in the early drafts.

You want to do this, because when your employees leave—either through retirement or through separation—you want your operations to continue without interruption. If you don't get the knowledge out of peoples' heads and onto paper (or other storage medium) *in a way that permits the next employee to perform it as well as the former employee did* then you are just wasting everybody's time.