

What I'd Do Next

How a first-draft onboarding guide becomes a living training program

Close the Feedback Loop

I left before ever getting a chance to workshop the document. It made sense to me — but did it make sense to others? What was good, what was bad, what could be improved? The actual user feedback was missing. Ideally, I would have sat down with a new hire and watched them use the instructions: what questions did they have, what tripped them up? Then revised, and tried it again. Input at the novice level would have been huge.

Bring the Experts Into the Room

I wanted to get all the inventory techs in a conference room with a big screen and walk through the document together — because what makes sense to me might not make sense to everyone, and vice versa. I wanted every subject-matter expert to weigh in, gather all the tips and tricks we each used, and put them in one place. From there, start documenting best practices and SOPs we could share and keep improving.

Some of the veteran technicians carried a small pencil and notepad they used to do the job. I wanted the wisdom that was in that little notepad — if it was helpful to them, there's a very good chance it would help others.

I'd have pulled in the other locations too. It was fundamentally the same work no matter where it was done, and every site had its own version of the notepad.

Teach Every Way People Learn

I loved teaching this material to new hires, and I wanted more of it — not least because I wanted the chance to learn from other people and fold their feedback into how the work gets done. Everybody trains a bit differently: some are visual learners, others need to talk it out, others learn by doing, by muscle memory. Try all of it, and use what works.

Know What Documentation Can't Do

I wrote the Survival Guide for myself. I'd been on the job a solid month before anyone told me to check my email. *Huh? We have email?* Between PTO gaps and people leaving, we were short-staffed and it was a scramble just to get the work done — let alone sit at a computer and read email. The computer work was a necessary part of the job, and I had to carve out time for it every day.

Documentation can't fix work culture. It can alleviate problems, but only if the problems are actually addressed — and if there's no value placed on reflection and feedback, the problems continue.