GRIT GUIDE
BY GRIT BLUEPRINT

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TEN TASKS READY IN TWO WEEKS

How to Get a New Counter Hire Ready in Two Weeks

A one-page plan that turns two weeks of shadowing into ten tasks a new hire can do alone.

Featuring Michael Tull and Marion Pulse

gritguide.com/how-to-get-a-new-counter-hire-ready-in-two-weeks/

8 steps 9 min read Checklist to print

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YOU'LL FINISH WITH

A two-week plan for one new hire: the ten tasks they must be able to do alone, who teaches each one, and a simple check on day ten.

THE STEPS

01 WRITE DOWN THE TEN TASKS THAT MEAN "READY"

02 NAME ONE TRAINER AND ONE BUDDY, AND TEST THE LOGINS

03 TEACH THE BUILDING BEFORE THE COMPUTER

04 GET THEM OUT OF THE STORE ONCE

05 TEACH THE QUESTIONS, NOT JUST THE PRODUCTS

06 WATCH ONE, DO ONE TOGETHER, DO ONE ALONE

07 SPEND TEN MINUTES AT THE END OF EVERY DAY

08 CHECK ON DAY TEN AND PLAN TO DAY NINETY

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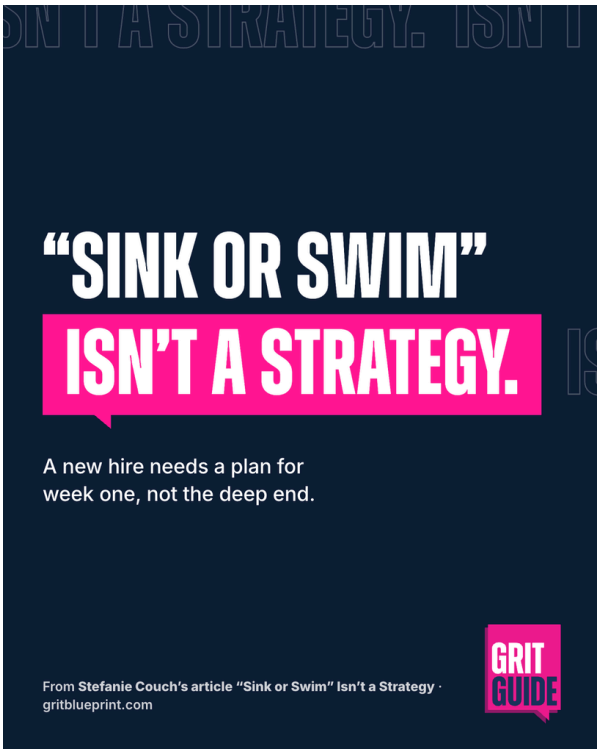
Most counter training happens by accident. The new person stands next to whoever is least busy, picks up some good habits and some bad ones, and learns the computer system one mistake at a time. Customers notice. So does the new hire.

A plan does not need a training department. It needs a short list of what “ready” means, one person who owns the teaching and ten minutes at the end of each day. This guide is for store managers, counter leads and owners at lumberyards, hardware stores and building materials dealers.

Two job names come up below. Counter sales staff help customers at the sales counter, on the phone and at pickup. Inside sales staff quote and handle orders from the store or office. In a small store, one person does both.

Why write it down? Stefanie Couch has described the usual training this way: “sit with Joe or Susan for a week and take in how they do things. Good luck.” When several people do the same job and one is far better at it, nobody can say what that person does differently. The new hire learns from whoever happens to be free that week.

Learn more from Stefanie Couch: Your Building Industry Training Strategy: “Sink or Swim” Isn’t a Strategy



The line is the title of Stefanie Couch’s article linked above. Credit: Grit Guide

BEFORE YOU START

- A list of what your counter people really do in a normal day
- One experienced person who is willing to teach and has time set aside to do it
- Login and system access set up and tested before day one
- A shared notebook or document for questions that come up

01 WRITE DOWN THE TEN TASKS THAT MEAN "READY"

Ask your best counter person what a new hire has to do without help to be useful on a busy morning. Write ten tasks, not ten topics. "Look up a price and stock for a contractor on the phone" is a task. "Learn the system" is not.

Your list will be your own. Common ones:

- Write a ticket, which is the sales order for a purchase
- Take a payment on an account and at the register
- Start a special order, which is a product you do not stock and order from the vendor (the company you buy it from) for one customer
- Process a return
- Load out a pickup, which means getting a customer's order onto their truck
- Take a delivery request
- Find the right person for a question they cannot answer

Asking your best person has a second payoff. It gets what they know onto paper while they still work for you.

Keep one rule for the whole plan. Sitting through training is not the same as being able to do the task. A task counts when you have watched the new hire do it.

02 NAME ONE TRAINER AND ONE BUDDY, AND TEST THE LOGINS

Pick one person to own the first two weeks. Other people can teach single tasks, but the new hire needs one person who knows what has been covered and what has not. Tell the trainer plainly that teaching is part of the job for these two weeks, and take something else off their plate to make room.

Then name a buddy: someone close to the new hire's own level who can answer the small questions nobody wants to ask the boss.

The manager's part is access. Log in as the new hire before day one and make sure the screens they need open. A person without a working login is not ready, however well the training went.

03 TEACH THE BUILDING BEFORE THE COMPUTER

On day one, walk the store and the yard. Show where things are, how they are grouped and where the odd items hide. Have the new hire draw a rough map and mark what they could not find on their own the next morning.

A person who knows where the product is can help a customer even when they are slow on the system. The reverse is not true.

04 GET THEM OUT OF THE STORE ONCE

In the first two weeks, send the new hire on one delivery run or one jobsite visit with a salesperson. An hour is enough. They should see where the product ends up and who is waiting for it.

Michael Tull, a manufacturer's rep (a salesperson who represents manufacturers in a territory) with more than fifty years in the door business, has trained new salespeople this way several times. He does not start in a conference room. He takes each one to a house under construction and walks through what has to happen before a door shows up. "It starts with the rough opening," he says. The rough opening is the framed hole in the wall that a door or window goes into. Get the opening right and the unit installed right, he says, and you do not get a callback, which is a return trip to fix a problem after the job is done. Watch the interview

05 TEACH THE QUESTIONS, NOT JUST THE PRODUCTS

Nobody learns every product in two weeks. They can learn the five questions that keep an order from going wrong:

- What is it for?
- What size, and how did you measure?
- How many?

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- When do you need it?
- Pickup or delivery, and where?

Then add the two or three extra questions your most common requests need. Your trainer knows them by heart. Write them down so the next hire gets the same list.

Teach the exceptions too. Which special orders need a deposit? Which cannot be returned? Which vendor has a longer lead time (how long an order takes to arrive) than the rest? Exceptions are where new people get caught.

And teach one sentence for everything else. Marion Pulse, who learned window and door terms before she went out to sell them, puts it this way: “It’s okay to say, I don’t know, and I’ll find the answer for you.” Show the new hire what comes after that sentence. Write the question down, say who will check it and tell the customer when they will hear back.

06 WATCH ONE, DO ONE TOGETHER, DO ONE ALONE

For each of the ten tasks, the new hire watches the trainer do it with a real customer, then does it with the trainer standing next to them, then does it alone with the trainer nearby.

Mark each stage on the list with the date. It takes thirty seconds and it shows you exactly where someone is stuck.

07 SPEND TEN MINUTES AT THE END OF EVERY DAY

Ask three things: What confused you today? What did a customer ask that you could not answer? What should we have shown you sooner?

Write the answers in the shared notebook. Daily check-ins during early training catch small problems before they grow. A new person also sees workarounds the rest of the team stopped noticing years ago. Ask now, before those start to feel normal to them too.

Start a second page in the notebook for common questions and the answers your team trusts. Begin with a handful. Add one whenever the same question comes up twice. For the hard ones, borrow the question from that “Sink or Swim” article for your experienced staff: “What’s the hardest customer situation you’ve faced, and how did you handle it?” Their stories fill in the part of your training that covers difficult customers.

After two or three hires, that notebook is your training manual, written in the words of the people who needed it.

Learn more from Stefanie Couch: Training Revolution: Empowering the 2025 Workforce to Overcome Labor Shortages

08 CHECK ON DAY TEN AND PLAN TO DAY NINETY

Go through the ten tasks together. For each one: alone, with help or not yet. Be honest in both directions.

Pick the two tasks that matter most from the “not yet” column and set a date for each. Then choose the next three things to learn, such as a product category, a key account (one of your biggest customers) or the delivery schedule.

Two weeks makes someone useful. It does not make them finished. On the Grit Blueprint Podcast, Marion Pulse credited her own early sales results to having “that time and a safe space to learn.” So put a day-thirty and a day-ninety check on the calendar before you close the notebook.

EXAMPLEMADE UP TO SHOW HOW IT WORKS

A hardware and lumber store hires Jordan for the contractor counter. The counter lead writes ten tasks on one page and takes the first two weeks as trainer.

By Wednesday of week one, Jordan can find product in the yard and write a ticket with help. On Thursday Jordan rides along on a morning delivery and sees a crew waiting on the load. The end-of-day notes show the same problem three days running: special orders. Jordan does not know which vendors need a deposit. The lead adds a one-page vendor list to the notebook that night.

On day ten, Jordan does seven tasks alone, two with help and one, returns on special orders, not yet. The lead sets a date for that one, picks decking as the first product category to learn in month two and books the day-thirty check.

TWO-WEEK READINESS CHECK

- [ ] The ten tasks are written down and the new hire has a copy
- [ ] One trainer and one buddy are named, and the trainer has time set aside
- [ ] System access was tested before day one
- [ ] The new hire has walked the store and yard and drawn a map
- [ ] One delivery run or jobsite visit is on the calendar
- [ ] The five questions are posted where the counter team can see them
- [ ] The new hire knows what to do after saying “I don’t know”
- [ ] Each task is marked: watched, did together, did alone
- [ ] The end-of-day notes and the common questions are in one shared place
- [ ] Day ten, day thirty and day ninety reviews are on the calendar

If two weeks feels short, keep the list of ten tasks and change the dates. The list is what makes it a plan.

FINISH LINE

You should now have: A two-week plan for one new hire: the ten tasks they must be able to do alone, who teaches each one, and a simple check on day ten.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Hand your new hire Your First 30 Days at a Building Materials Dealer, a week-by-week plan written for them, and the Building Industry Glossary for the words they will hear in week one. For your own next read, the Window and Door Order Checklist is a ready-made list of the special-order details new people miss.

Disclosure: Marion Pulse is now Client Success Director at Grit Blueprint, which publishes Grit Guide. Her words here come from her 2024 Grit Blueprint Podcast interview, recorded while she was at NFRC.

EPISODES IN THIS PIECE

Marion Pulse on Confidence, Patience and Finding Your Place in Fenestration
With Marion Pulse · The Grit Blueprint Podcast · Nov 2026

The Real Reason Customers Buy Again
With Michael Tull · The Grit Blueprint Podcast · Feb 2026

SOURCES

1. Your Building Industry Training Strategy: "Sink or Swim" Isn't a Strategy Stefanie Couch, Grit Blueprint
2. Training Revolution: Empowering the 2025 Workforce to Overcome Labor Shortages Stefanie Couch, Grit Blueprint
3. The Real Reason Customers Buy Again (Grit Blueprint Podcast, Michael Tull with host Stefanie Couch) Grit Guide
4. Marion Pulse on Confidence, Patience and Finding Your Place in Fenestration (Grit Blueprint Podcast) (December 2024) Grit Guide

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ONLINE
This guide, the episode behind it and the rest of the Grit Guides are at **gritguide.com/how-to-get-a-new-counter-hire-ready-in-two-weeks/**

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