

Training Techniques

A guide for safety leaders By Amy Stewart

Preparation is important. Training sessions can be so much better, if a little time is invested in advance to prepare for the training session. Follow these simple steps to develop a great training session.

The first step in training is to prepare for the training session by answering these basic training questions and taking action to get started.

Preparation

Who will be the audience? Identify the characteristics of who will attend. For example, how much do they know about the subject, what are their interests and how will they use the information.

What are the training objectives? What do you want the attendees to take away with them? Will you try to sell them on ideas, embrace change or utilize new methods? Will this be an informational training session? To provide your training session with a well-defined purpose, formulate clear and specific objectives rather than general statements. At the completion of the training, what do you want attendees to know or understand? Are there specific actions you want them to take? Is it possible to connect the training to the company's safety goals or safety vision?

Where will the meeting take place? If possible, arrange to meet in an area with ample space that is free from distraction. Consider seating needs, including whether or not you will need tables on which to write. Will there be adequate lighting, and will it be necessary to dim or adjust the light levels? Should you furnish water or other beverages? Are toilet facilities nearby? Training is more effective if people are comfortable and when training sessions are well planned and engaging.

When is the best time to schedule the training? Prepare well in advance. Try to pick a convenient time, one that takes into account people's schedules, production commitments, and holidays. Try not to schedule at the beginning or end of the month or on Mondays. Fridays can sometimes be difficult, as well. Mornings or early in the shift are better than afternoons or late in the shift.

Prepare by gathering materials, policies, procedures, equipment, news articles, examples and anything else to help make the training interesting and visual. Collect historical information you can share, such as previous incidents, incidents that occurred at other organizations, workers' compensation information, pictures/slides, etc. It is often helpful to show examples of good performance, equipment, practice and process, so that attendees can see what "good" looks like.

Audience participation

Consider the amount of audience participation you desire. Information transfer is greatly improved, if people are provided the opportunity to participate during training.

Here are participation techniques you may wish to consider.

- Use question and answer sessions to develop audience interaction and to test knowledge.
- Use small-group breakout sessions that permit groups of individuals to develop ideas and thoughts in response to a question or a challenging problem.
- Following videotape presentations, ask the audience what they thought were the important points, or how the information applies to their work setting. Record thoughts on whiteboard or flip chart for review.
- Ask a participant to read a short paragraph (prepared in advance) that explains an important point. This information could be from a news clipping, procedure or incident review.
- Give each participant a short quiz to answer. After completing the quiz, have participants, one at a time, answer a question and see if everyone agrees. If not in agreement, there is a learning opportunity.

Audio/visual planning

Audiovisual materials can greatly improve learning. Collect or develop overhead transparencies, slides, pictures, PowerPoint slides, videotapes or audiotapes that demonstrate key points or help to supplement key topics. One needs to be careful, however, not to overdo it. Audio/visual materials are supplementary and should not become the presentation.

Organizing the training session

The second step is to organize the training session. By formatting the session into sections, the presentation will be effective, go smoothly and you will achieve the training objectives. Organize by dividing the training session into three sections.

Section one, the introduction.

Consider how you want to introduce people, yourself and generally create a relaxed atmosphere. Introduce the topic and why people have been invited to the training session, along with the purpose of the training.

Discuss the training objectives, and then ask the participants what they want to take away from the training session. It is advisable to write the training objectives and the participants' "take-aways" on a white board or flip chart.

Section two, the main part of the training session.

In this section, preparation, audience participation and audio/visual planning come together.

First, get the participants' attention by telling a brief story or relating an incident that illustrates the importance of safety in relation to the training session objectives.

Second, get into a thorough and honest discussion of how the training topic relates to those in attendance, to their families and to the organization. For example: Why do people not follow safe work practices? How does not wearing safety equipment affect productivity? What is necessary to do the job safely and productively? The key is to create honest dialogue, not a negative, destructive, anti-organization movement.

Third, discuss a safe way of operating, such as how the procedure works, or how people can help one another to work safely, or how to get assistance, or what to do when an emergency occurs. Help the audience think through their decision-making process when they are confronted with the topic.

Fourth, spell out the benefits of making the right choice. Help people to visualize the good things ahead, if they make the safe choice. Be careful not to threaten with negatives. Instead, help attendees see how they and the organization benefit from working safely.

Section three involves influencing action.

You want the attendees to use the information on the job right away and to make the right decisions. So, give them easy steps to take. Once people have made a decision and take a modest step toward working safely, they have done the hardest work.

What might be an easy step? If they are too numerous to name, an effective way is to create a to-do list. What needs to be done differently, or what will each person start to do when they are back on the job? Identify other actions that need to be taken in support of working safely, and ask for volunteers, or assign people to carry out these assignments.

Conclude the training session by summarizing the to-do list and all assignments. If possible, inform participants of the next training session date, time and location. Also, document the training activity.

References

Web sites

- Safety & Health Training Resources (Occupational Safety and Health Administration): www.osha.gov/dte/library

Standards

- ANSI Z490.1, Criteria for Accepted Practices in Safety, Health and Environmental Training, American National Standards Institute.

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