



Why Training Fails

Even with top-notch trainers and tools, sometimes safety training still fails. But why? Here are three things to focus on to ensure training at your company is successful.

By John Mavros

Over the last 30 years, I have either conducted or taken part in nearly 1,000 corporate-sponsored training courses, the majority of which were related to using job-essential safety software. As I reflected on the training sessions that weren't so successful, I thought about why companies train workers in the first place. In the world of safety, no matter the topic, the goal of training is often to teach workers how to be more efficient, do their jobs better, and, ultimately, work safely.

So, why does this sometimes fail? It comes down to three things. There might be a lack of a leadership-sponsored purpose/value of the training. Other times, the content of the sessions lacks focus. Or, there could be no meaningful reinforcement of what is taught. Sometimes, the lack of all three of these things contributes to a failed training course. And, a failed training course may mean your workers aren't working as safely as they could be.

Lack of Leadership-Sponsored Purpose/Value

All too often when people are asked to attend a training session, they simply receive a notice of the training with a requirement to attend. There is no compelling communication from leadership that provides details behind the purpose of the training and what the value is to the individual relative to doing his or her job better or more efficiently.

In the end, if leadership does not provide demonstrated support of the importance of the training, then attendees will assume it is not important or that it's just the next "flavor of the month." In addition, if the purpose is not clear, employees might determine that the training is optional or that the stated purpose does not apply to them. As a result, the training will often be poorly attended, or attention during the session will be limited.

Beyond purpose, the attendees will also adjust their attitude toward the training based on their perceived individual value of what they will learn. Often, leadership has a corporate or department value assigned to giving employees additional training; however, individuals are only going to engage with tools that they believe will make them do their jobs better or more efficiently. If they do not believe this is true, then once again, session attendance or attentiveness will be impacted.

Content Lacks Focus

Assuming employees successfully receive communication on the purpose of the training and the individual value, next it is important to deliver clear, focused content that builds on the value. I have been in many training sessions where the trainer, materials, and setting were truly world-class, but it really didn't teach me what I needed to know. The problem was that instead of giving me specific-use cases that I could

use to engage in the training, I was given a field-by-field or feature-by-feature lecture.

It is just not accomplishing much of anything to provide someone detailed knowledge without the specific context of how they are going to make use of it in his or her job. It's common to see attendees mentally "check out" the moment they start to perceive that the current information being presented is not directly connected to how they are going to do their job better or more efficiently.

Training sessions that are focused, show a flow of work, and explain details step-by-step are far more successful. For example, you wouldn't teach someone how to play basketball by giving a detailed explanation of the rules and instructing them how to make a basketball. A player generally starts with a desire to play and to learn how to get the basketball in the hoop in as few instructions as possible. Understand your audience, and train with use cases that are of value to them.

Lack of Reinforcement

Lack of a call to action and follow-up is by far one of the biggest reasons that training sessions fail. Even if you have a strong purpose/value and do a great job of teaching through use cases, the impact of the training can still fail. As an attendee and instructor, I have seen people learn and get energized by learning a new tool just to go back to their desk and continue doing business as usual. This is mostly due to a lack of meaningful reinforcement.

It is important that attendees have specific actions after training to reinforce what they just learned in a timely manner. One of my responsibilities is to instruct safety professionals on how to electronically collect and analyze safety data. There is a follow-up set for 2–4 weeks after training with an expectation that at least 10 inspections are performed. This establishes an immediate call to action and gives employees something meaningful to do to reinforce what they have learned. In addition, this provides enough repetition to allow them to come up with other questions or features they did not think to ask about in the training session.

When training fails, workers fail to learn what is needed, managers struggle to ensure day-to-day work is conducted as it should be, and companies often miss meeting their objectives in a variety of ways. Not only can companies not afford to spend a tremendous amount of money on ineffective training but also in safety the consequences can be much greater. For your company's next training course, be sure to clearly state the course's purpose/value, deliver content that is focused and engaging, and set calls to action that reinforce the learned material. **SD**

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