

Safety Training Games and Activities on a Budget

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Introduction

Safety professionals around the world are being challenged to do more with much less and many safety departments are operating with smaller budgets and less staff. Fortunately, this does not mean that you have to resort to showing the same old safety videotapes over and over or leave out training games and activities all together. You can add value to your training classes and make them more effective by adding training games and activities that get your audience involved. Luckily, with just a little planning and creativity, you can create interactive activities no matter what your budget.

Look around your office. What do you see that you could use in a safety training class? One of the most readily available safety training activity materials is paper. Yes, plain old white copy paper. What else? Take a visit to your office supply closet. There are many possibilities for training materials right there in front of you if you use your imagination.

Safety training is too important to be boring. Even with carefully planned slides, great content and a great video, safety trainers are still likely to see trainees dozing off or not paying attention. When safety training is not interactive and trainees focus on something other than the topic, they are not learning the important information that is being presented. Safety training games and other interactive activities are one way to keep the trainee involved while increasing his or her learning and retention of the material. Safety games make learning interactive by making the trainee an active participant and making mundane information something enjoyable and memorable.

The whole idea of using fun and games in safety training comes from the principles of accelerated learning. Whatever learning tools work to increase and enhance learning can be called accelerated learning methods. Alternative learning should not be confused with "fluff" activities that are often used as icebreakers. Everything in an accelerated learning class is focused on the results and not the materials or activities themselves. For example, a safety trainer announces that everyone is going to get up play musical chairs with the goal of getting everyone relaxed and "ready to learn." While this might seem like a fun icebreaker, a musical chairs game is fun only for the sake of being fun. None of the information to be covered in this training is being

reinforced by this activity. In an accelerated learning class, we might also play games but the games have a different focus – on the results, instead of the activity. For example, class teams could complete a crossword puzzle where the clues of the puzzle are really a review of the material covered in class. This game is still fun and gets everyone involved but accelerated learning principles are in action, especially when you have small teams work on each puzzle instead of individuals.

Why Fun?

Positive emotions are very important in enhancing learning, and having fun is a great way to encourage positive emotions in your class. If someone is sitting endlessly in a lecture, they probably won't have positive emotions for very long. Activities can help with these positive emotions. If someone is stressed or bored or angry, his or her learning will be inhibited. If learning is positive, relaxed, and engaging, learning will be increased. Activities such as games can help to keep the trainee engaged.

How and When to Use Games

Games can be used in most safety training classes with a little foresight and planning. To keep trainees' attention, an activity should be introduced approximately every 12 minutes. These activities can be as simple as a question and answer period or a detailed game. To use games effectively in safety training classes, consider the following guidelines.

Give your class attendees problem-posing and information-accessing exercises that get them to think, make connections, and make meaning for themselves. As mentioned earlier, it is very important with safety training that we help trainees learn to take the information that is presented to them and then have them customize it for their specific needs. For example, in a hazard communication training class, you would not just review a sample MSDS but you would have the trainee 1) locate the MSDS for a product he or she actually uses on their daily job and 2) ask them to determine which types of personal protective equipment are required when using that chemical and 3) where they would find that personal protective equipment. Strive for total learner involvement, i.e., having the trainee totally and actively involved with full responsibility for his or her own learning.

Games can help provide opportunities for the attendees to collaborate with one another and be social. When your trainees work together, they will use more of their total brain and learning will increase. If you present the class with a problem, an exercise or even a game, have them complete it in teams so they can work together on finding the solution.

Have plenty of opportunities for people to get up and out of their seats and move around. Activity can increase the learning process, keep the attendees more involved, and help chase away boredom. Getting people physically active and using as many senses as possible will help awaken the body and improve circulation. This will have a positive impact on learning. The part of the human brain involved with movement is the motor cortex, and it is located right next to the area used for problem solving. If you restrict bodily movement, you restrict the total brain from functioning at its best. Learning is hampered when we separate the body from the mind. Many people find it difficult to concentrate when their bodies are not doing something physical. Think about the people you sit next to in training classes that are constantly doodling, twirling their pen

or bouncing their leg up and down. These are probably people who learn better when they are active.

Safety Training Games and Activities for Those on a Tight Budget

As a proactive and forward thinking safety trainer, you already have an open-mind when it comes to trying new activities that can benefit others in the workplace. You should continue to have an open mind when it comes to using a variety of games in safety training classes.

Paper Toss

Materials: trashcan or bucket for each team (preferably clean); 5 sheets of paper per team

Have your class form teams of 2 or 5. Then have each team take 5 sheets of paper and write one question related to the class topic on each sheet. Have the teams each crumple up each of their sheets of paper so that each team has 5 paper balls. Have the teams stand on opposite sides of the room (about 6-10 feet apart, depending on their skill level), each with a trashcan or bucket in front of them on the floor. If there are more than 2 teams, have them stand in a triangle or square so each team is the same distance apart. Have the team take turns tossing one paper ball into another team's can or bucket. If they miss, the ball is discarded. If the ball goes in, the team standing behind the bucket where it went must answer the question on the ball. Wait until all teams have tried to toss all of their paper balls into another team's bucket before asking each team to read the questions on the balls in their bucket and to give the correct answer to the question if they know it. The team that answers the highest percentage of their questions correctly wins. For example, if a team had 4 balls successfully thrown into their bucket and answered two correctly (50%), they would beat a team that had 7 balls thrown in their bucket and answered 3 correctly. If time allows, all of the discarded paper balls can be opened and read by the instructor.

This game is effective because it involves everyone in the class. There is also an element of fun and surprise and it's an activity that is difficult to complete without laughter. As described earlier, laughter is a great way to make training more effective because trainees learn better when relaxed, and laughter leads to relaxation. This is also a better way to review information than just looking over a PowerPoint slide once more. When each team uncrumples each ball in their bucket and reads the question aloud to the group, and then tries to answer, they are in fact leading part of the review. If the teams have a discussion about the question and what possible answers could be, they are learning from their peers, which is extremely effective. When the teams are first formulating their questions, they are thinking through what they just learned or already know and selecting what they think might be difficult or challenging, so they are in fact learning even at this stage but they probably don't realize it.

Scavenger Hunt

Materials Needed: Post-It Notes

If you trust your trainees to leave the training area and go out on their own to work on an activity, a scavenger hunt can be a great way to get the class up and moving. Scavenger hunts work well for topics where knowledge of different areas or locations of supplies is important such as in a Hazard Communication Class, a Fire Safety Class, a PPE class or even a Spill Response Class. Before class starts you will need to set up your scavenger hunt. You can do this two

different ways. First, would be to identify a number of areas that are important to the training topic and then think of a clue for each area. You can write each clue on a different note and then place all but one of the post-it notes at different locations (the locations described by the clues). You will give the remaining post-it note to the trainees. Once they know the answer to the first clue, they can travel to the spot described to find the second clue and so on. After they have collected all post-it notes (within an allotted amount of time) they are to return to the training area for follow up discussion. For example, for a chemical safety class, your first clue could be to find the location where acetone is stored (or another flammable liquid that is stored in your facility). This location would hopefully be a flammable storage cabinet. At the flammable storage cabinet, you would have another clue, such as “go to the location you go to when you splash XYZ chemical in your eyes (and hopefully this would lead them to an eyewash). This should continue for about 8-12 clues. If you work in a large facility, you will need to restrict the scavenger hunt area to a particular section or department--explained in advance to your trainees – so that they have a better chance of finding the locations you are talking about. If you have 100 eyewashes in your location, you can see where the problem might be.

The other way to run a scavenger hunt activity is to simply write all of the location clues on one sheet of paper and give each team a copy of the clues. Then, at each location place a simple post-it with a single letter. When all of the locations have been found, the letters collected at each one should be able to be rearranged to spell a word related to the class topic. Each team should try to find out the word.

Safety Consultant for a Minute

Materials: 1 piece of paper for each group of 4-6

Every trainee is given one sheet of paper and asked to write across the top one question they have about the topic or about an area where they need help. Tell the trainees that they are all Safety Consultants for this exercise. With a large timer in view, tell the class that when time starts, they need to pass their sheet to the right. When they do this, they will also be getting a sheet as well. They will have one minute to answer the question at the top of the paper they received before time is called and the process is repeated. When they get the second sheet, they need to first quickly read the other answers and then add something new before time is called again. The process is repeated every minute until everyone has had everyone else's paper. When each trainee gets their original paper back, give them time to review all of the comments. Ask the class if anyone can share an idea they received that they might never have thought of and also ask what the benefit is of getting others' input into specific situations that they are addressing.

Safety-Consultant-for-a-Minute works because everyone is involved, it is fast moving, and it requires participants to use some creativity. They also get to help their fellow trainees to solve real problems using their pre-existing safety knowledge.

Lone Ranger

Materials Needed: index cards (10 per team)

The Lone Ranger usually sparks a great deal of dialogue. At least two teams are required. The teams should be a group of 2-5 people. Before the class, you need to develop a list of 10 facility repairs that could be related to safety, and preferably, to the class topic. Each of these 10 repairs is written on a separate index card. One complete set of index cards would have 10

different repairs on 10 different cards. If you have 2 teams, you will need 2 identical complete sets. If you have 3 teams, you will need 3 identical complete sets, and so on. Each team has 5 minutes to put these ten items in order of priority for repair by the “lone” maintenance employee at the plant who must fix everything himself. When each group is through, ask each team to report on their ranking and write the number order on a flipchart. Do this with each team and you will likely see great differences, which should lead to an energetic discussion that you can tie into your content. This will probably be one of the few times where you have employees arguing over safety (but in a good way).

Safety Sort

Materials Needed: index cards (30 per team)

Safety Sort is similar to Lone Ranger. To use Safety Sort, write out approximately 30 different hazardous conditions. Each of these conditions should be written on an index card, and several sets of the cards are needed (it is easier and quicker if these 30 hazards are typed up as labels and then the labels are applied to the index cards). Each team should be given a set of 30 cards with the instructions to sort the cards into 3 piles. The first pile should be minor hazards that can go through a normal work order process to get repaired. The second pile should be hazards that need to be fixed that day. The third pile should be issues that require that work be stopped immediately until the repair is made. After each team has finished their sorting, lead a discussion where each team shares the items they placed into each group and then compare the sorting decisions made by the other teams. Again, if the hazards are identified properly, this activity should lead into the class material.

A-Z Race

Materials Needed: Large Sheet of Paper (like from a flip chart) for each team

A to Z Race is a great way to review the class content while adding a bit of competition to the group. You will need to give a large sheet of paper to each team and ask them to draw a line down the middle. They should write A through M down one side and N through Z down the other. The goal of the activity is for each team to come up with a word or phrase related to the class content for each letter of the alphabet. The teams can use their notes for the activity. This is a race so all teams should be striving to finish first. The first team to fill in words or phrases for each letter wins. After one team finishes, post their answers and review with the class.

This is an exciting and highly interactive way to review class material. Instead of glancing over some summary PowerPoint slides, the teams are collaborating to come up with answers related to the content they just learned, including reviewing their training notes or other class materials. When one team has finished and is declared the winner, their A-Z words are reviewed with the entire class, which is yet another chance to review the class material.

Other Free Resources and How to Incorporate Them into Safety Training

Free BINGO Creator

BINGO is an easy game to learn, although most trainees will probably have played it before. If you Google “BINGO Card Creator” you will get many hits that offer free sites where you can create a customizable set of BINGO cards. For a BINGO game to be challenging and

competitive, there need to be different variations of the cards and these online BINGO creators can do that.

In order for a BINGO game to be useful in a safety training class, the game must relate to the class content. If the information on the cards was just random information for the sake of the game, the game would be fun but it would not be an effective interactive learning tool. To do this you need to fill the individual squares on a BINGO card with words or phrases related to the topic. One way to use the BINGO cards as a learning tool is to think of 25 questions and associated answers related to the class and then to put the answers inside the different squares on the BINGO cards. Your job as Trainer will be to randomly select one of the 25 questions, read it and then ask your trainees to find the correct answer on their BINGO card. If they have the correct answer, they should mark it off with an "X." The trainees should be told that the first trainee to get 5 X's straight across, wins. The instructor will continue selecting and reading random questions until someone has the 5 X's.

There are many free BINGO card creators online, but two to try can be found at <http://print-bingo.com> or <http://www.freeprintablebingo.com>.

Slideshare

Slideshare is a free online tool where thousands of people upload and share their presentations on everything from Apple to Zebras. If you visit the site and search "safety" you will see that there are over 200,000 presentations available. If you search "occupational safety" you will still get over 30,000 presentations. There are some excellent free resources on Slideshare, but to get the most out of this site you should search for exactly what you want and you will get a much more manageable number of presentations to preview. If you are short on time and need a PowerPoint presentation to complement your existing training plan, Slideshare can be a good (and free) resource.

YouTube

Although YouTube might be more well known for silly or embarrassing videos, advertising, and crazy things like cats playing piano or babies dancing, there is also an abundance of free safety training material available. Just search your topic or your topic + training and you will get hundreds of options. If you have an Internet connection at your training location, you can easily bring up the video you want to use in your class and show it. There are also software programs available that will allow you to download any YouTube video so you can show it even when you are not online. So how do you turn these videos into an interactive class activity? Of course you will need to preview the videos before you use them and when you are watching them, be on the lookout for highlights that you can use in your class. One way to use a video is to stop it at key points and discuss what is going on, what is being done safely. or what is not being done safely. It is often very easy to find very old safety videos that you can use to compare to your workplace policies and procedures. To make this activity into a game, divide the class up into teams before watching the video and ask each team to write down as many safe activities or unsafe activities (or both) as they can see. At the end of the video, the team with the most activities identified wins. You could also take this one step further and combine a pictogram activity with watching the video. Tell the teams that they need to carefully watch the video and when it is over, they will need to make a pictogram (safety sign without words) that is either needed or would be helpful in the movie clip they just watched.

Showing a video clip gets attention because it is novel. Most likely, your audience will not have seen the clip before. They will need to watch it in order to complete the exercise at the end. When you have a team work on compiling a list of observations to report, you are also encouraging collaboration and peer-discussion, which is key. If you have the teams or individuals draw pictograms for the video, they are switching from using their eyes and ears for learning to their brain and body. To be able to draw an applicable pictogram is going to take creative thought about the situation and when this occurs, the trainee is making a connection from the newly learned material to experiences in their day to day job, and this is how learning occurs. It doesn't really matter if the pictogram doesn't make sense to anyone other than the creator. The creator is thinking and analyzing the topic in their head and there might be a few laughs at the same time (and as mentioned earlier fun is always a good addition to a safety training class).

Practical Information for all Games and Activities

Before using any game in a safety training class, practice the game to make sure that it 1) works, 2) the game is not threatening or too difficult, 3) you have adequate time allotted, 4) the necessary materials are available, and 5) you have the answers to any quizzes or other game where an answer is the result. You should also check that safety game instructions are clear and complete. If you need to stop to correct yourself or the directions, you will lose the trainees' attention and your credibility. For longer activities, clear written instructions might be necessary. Additionally, you should have more materials than you think you will need. Finally, make sure you will have enough room in the planned training space to have the trainees perform the activity. If they need to split up and work apart from each other, is there space in the room or will you have to send them elsewhere? Beware of this – you could lose control of the group. If the teams need to spread out and work on large sheets of paper, is there enough table space? By working through the activity ahead of time, you will have an idea of the space required.

Dividing the training class into teams works well for most training games. Studies have shown that the social interaction that is involved with a team leads to greater learning. Teams also encourage more participation and ideas. The number of members on each team will affect the activity time. Teams of four or more often need a leader and usually take longer to work on an activity than a team of two or three.

Before assigning the class into teams, think about what you are trying to accomplish. If you want everyone involved, teams of 3 work best. If everyone must be involved, pairs are necessary. If the team is larger than 3, a leader will emerge and some may feel left out. Teams of four or five will also provide the opportunity for a leader to emerge. A team of 6 or more will require a definite leader with adequate leadership skills to lead the group. When assigning teams, keep in mind that some people are not comfortable being on the same team as their manager or supervisor and vice versa.

Debriefing

Finally, we need to say a word about debriefing. Debriefing is a term often used to describe the time when you help the trainees, through the asking of specific questions, to reflect upon an activity. After all is said and done, people are going to learn from the activity when they are able to reflect on the experience. When the trainees are wrapped up in the activity, they may be laughing or deep in a team discussion so they probably aren't thinking about what they are

learning. Debriefing is the most important part of the exercise but unfortunately, it is also usually the most overlooked. Many safety professionals have never even heard of the word.

Debriefing should encourage discussion. It is suggested that you have a list of questions developed that will help you to achieve the particular learning objectives for the class that you are delivering. For example, imagine the learning objective of a safety leadership class was for supervisors to choose between different forms of communication (like acknowledgement, parroting, or paraphrasing). Based on this objective, you could come up with the following possible debriefing questions:

- What form of communication did you use in this activity?
- What occurred in this activity that you could use back on the job?
- What did you like least about the method of communication used in this exercise?

It is good to start off with generic debriefing questions such as “What did you like most about this activity?” Also, make sure you have a question or two that is going to help them take the training they received and apply it back in the workplace. In the above example, you could ask, “When would paraphrasing be good to use back on the job?” Keep in mind that you always want debriefing to lead to a two-way conversation. Do not ask questions that can be answered with a yes or no. Also, never tell someone that his or her answer is wrong. An answer to a debriefing exercise is based on a person’s perception of the experience so there is really no right or wrong answer. If you do get an answer that does not reflect what you saw, try to ask the question again in a different way. When you are in the planning phase of your training class, create more debriefing questions than you think you will need. Remember, debriefing is really a way for the trainees to discover for themselves what they have learned.

Summary

Shrinking safety budgets do not have to mean an end to fun in safety training. By using your imagination and office supplies you probably have sitting around you right now, you can easily create a variety of interactive activities that can be used to make your training classes more effective.

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