

## **What's Wrong with Mandatory EHS Training (And How to Fix It)!**

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### **Introduction**

Mandatory training has many inherent problems – it's not “learner-friendly” and runs counter to good adult learning principles. There are certainly plenty of “fixes” we can apply to make it “better” for both the learners and training outcomes. We'll discuss these problems and fixes using several case studies.

We'll discuss various aspects of safety training including the following:

- Needs assessment / questions?
- Learning objectives (mine for you - yours?)
- “Givens” (not Robin)
- Problems (existing and future)
- Fixes (how to make it better)
- ALPs (no, not the mountains! ;-)
- Case studies (examples of don'ts and dos)
- Closing thoughts (where from here?)
- Questions (anything else)?

Some learning objectives for the reader include that at the conclusion of this paper readers will be able to:

- ü Describe at least three problems with mandatory training;
- ü Explain how to “fix” these problems; and
- ü Demonstrate more effective and “learner-friendly” training.

## **“Givens”**

There are certain truisms that we can accept as being givens in safety training including that adult learners and learning are:

- Self-directed
- Participate
- Discuss
- Share expertise
- Applicable and fill a “need”
- “Active” learning

As a result we can conclude that mandatory training is 180 degrees counter to good or effective adult learning principles (ALPs)

## **Problems**

It should therefore come as no surprise that there are many problems with mandatory safety training. These include the following:

- OSHA is not the problem ... our attempts at compliance are!
- OSHA requires training to be what? Effective!
- Technology is not the problem ... our (over and mis- or ab-) use of it is!
- Lack of a training needs assessment,
- Ineffective training delivery,
- Too heavy an emphasis on information (over learner needs),
- An expectation of automatic learning outcomes,
- An over reliance on written tests, and
- Viewing training as a stand-alone entity.

## **Solutions**

If there are many problems there are also a myriad of solutions. These include:

- Always putting the learners’ needs first,
- Conducting a training needs assessment,
- Using and following the ANSI/ASSE Z490 Standard on Accepted EHS Training Practices, and
- Using any of the myriad of adult learning principles (ALPs) such as:
  - Involving the students in setting learning goals;
  - Being more of a facilitator of other’s learning;
  - Keeping a positive attitude and not getting defensive;
  - The use of humor in general;
  - Self-deprecating humor by the trainer/facilitator;
  - Learning benefits of students doing the teaching;
  - Personalizing the teaching;
  - The positive learning aspects of trainee (and trainer) mistakes;

- Flexibility in topic discussions; and
- Validating accomplishment of learning objectives.
- Active Approaches and Methods:
  - Ice breakers,
  - Video,
  - Demonstration,
  - Brain-storming,
  - Role-playing,
  - Large group / open discussion,
  - Question/answer (Q&A),
  - Co-training,
  - Game-playing,
  - Safe experiments,
  - Pairs or dyads,
  - Tours,
  - Triads,
  - Hands-on,
  - Small group work,
  - Pre-/Post-tests,
  - Case studies,
  - Problem-solving,
  - Fishbowl,
  - Ad lib or spontaneous training,
  - Teaching others, ...
  - ... and more!

## Case Studies

We'll be using a variety of training case studies to facilitate our discussions. Some case studies include the following mandatory safety training scenarios:

### 1. **Your mandatory OSHA-authorized trainer refresher:**

- The givens:
  - OSHA wants to update their 10 and 30-hour trainers
  - OSHA wants no fraud or bad training as has occurred
  - Refreshers are required every 4 years for these trainers
  - They are all very experienced EHS trainers
- What to do?
  - Have them decide on specific content
  - Have them train each other on the subjects
  - Communicate all changes via email ahead and just go over it briefly in the course
  - Treat them as fellow trainers and adult learners

### 2. **College Health Clinic staff:**

- The givens:
  - Bloodborne pathogens annual refresher for several years
  - Doc's, RNs, PTs, EMTs, Coaches (who likely know much more about it than an EHS trainer)

- Problem? They're not gloving up and using Universal Precautions
- All they can give is a 30-minute session
- What to do?
  - Do a needs assessment – ask a practitioner (i.e., a Doctor)
  - Do your research (e.g., on the CDC website)
  - Create a 1-page data sheet specific to healthcare workers
  - Acknowledge that you aren't one of them (a healthcare professional – unless you actually are)
  - Create an *affective* approach – read them a letter by a college co-ed bemoaning the promiscuity and unprotected sex of her fellow college students
- 3. Not wearing safety glasses (lumber mill/yard):**
  - The givens:
    - Lumber mill/yard workers aren't wearing their safety glasses consistently
    - Due for all of their annual refreshers (PPE, hazcom, ergo, BBPs, LOTO, etc.)
  - What to do?
    - Find a case study with an eye injury from not wearing safety glasses
    - Make sure that it is *directly* relatable and applicable to their work
    - Demonstrate the capacity of nails, etc. to injure an eye by using an egg or the eye from an animal (post mortem of course)
    - Have a person with an eye injury tell their story
    - Don't make it gruesome – their imaginations will fill it in just fine
- 4. Asbestos worker course – 2 of 10 trainees can't read well:**
  - The givens:
    - 10 workers at a gas pipeline facility
    - They need to pass an Asbestos Abatement Worker Initial Course
    - Some are from CT, some are from MS
    - 1 each are “reading-challenged”
    - Each must get >70% on the written exam per EPA and State regulations (or they cannot do the work)!
  - What to do?
    - Deliver the course with all written learning materials also given verbally
    - Use repetition, mnemonics, hands-on, games, and other approaches to facilitate learning and memorization
    - Encourage them to self-identify as needing assistance
    - Tell them that you can/will deliver the test verbally
    - Encourage one to assist another
    - Ask them how they're doing during the test and again if they'd prefer it be given verbally
- 5. Umpteenth HAZWOPER refresher:**
  - The givens:
    - Environmental engineering consultants
    - Engineers, Geologists, Scientists, Risk Assessors (chemicals), others
    - Most are on their umpteenth refresher (10+ years)
    - A few “newbies”
  - What to do?
    - Do a needs assessment

- Give them a list of sub-topics as suggestions
- Work with their office contacts on a refined list
- Ask the students what they want to discuss and learn
- Play training games
- Have them teach each other
- Make it active and engaging

**6. Others?**

- What about any of your own cases?

## **Closing Thoughts**

So, where do we go from here you might ask. And well you should. Here are a few questions to ask when developing training and some recommendations:

- Is it a training need?
- If it is, what is/are the training need(s)?
- Are there other ways and means?
- Develop effective learning objectives!
- Design active training!
- Deliver learner-centered/friendly training!
- Don't always give a test!
- Strive to improve!