

## **Dice, Crayons and Taboo: Bringing the Life Back into Safety Training**

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### **Introduction**

Have you ever sat in a training class and thought about everything except what you were learning in the class? Or, have you ever been in a class where you had to fight to make sure you stayed awake throughout the class? Are you tired of teaching employees that don't seem interested in learning about how to stay safe on the job?

You may have heard the expression that the definition of insanity is to repeat the same behavior over and over again expecting a different result. This is the approach many trainers may take with their safety initiatives. However, with the variety of generations now in the workplace, we must all be willing to change our teaching methods. Otherwise, only a portion of our workplace may grasp the concepts and the remaining employees will not. This can lead not only to poor production, but even worse: to people becoming injured or injuring others.

Through this training course, recommendations will be made on how to liven up your training classes and improve the retention and reaction of your employees. Most all the games I discuss come from playing games at camp, or at various retreats, or finding them on the Internet. Their sources or creators can no longer be determined because they have been used so frequently. While the goals of the games are not mine, I have added in touches to make them suitable for the various industries I have worked in. Hopefully, you will be able to do the same.

### **The Concept**

Having worked in retail and manufacturing for about ten years, I have experienced what most of you have probably been through—the experience of my training classes not seeming to sink in with my employees. Of course, I did what had always been done, and that was popping in my little, convenient video, dimming the lights and going to work in my office until the video was done. Then, after the video I would give a test just to make sure the employees understood the information. Well, of course they all passed with flying colors. But in reality, who wouldn't with questions such as “what do you do with hazardous materials?” and answers such as “throw it away, leave it where it is, or put it in the hazardous material cage after labeling”? Needless to say, by the next day, my fabulous training was completely forgotten or worse, ignored.

This is when I made a decision that something had to be done. OK, in reality it was really because I got tired of processing the workers compensation paperwork and managing the claims. But regardless, I made the decision that what I was doing was not working. This led to the question of what could I do that would work? What would make the employees more engaged in the training and more apt to retain and follow the information provided during the sessions?

I thought about my own learning style. I never did well in classes that were only lecture style. To be honest, I usually slept. As I have gotten older and sleeping is no longer acceptable in a business meeting, I turn to my cell phone or my I-pad. I always remember bits and pieces of the various sessions I attend, but nothing ever really sticks with me. However, I am a superstar in classes where I can get up and move around; classes that require interaction; classes that incorporate learning with doing. Mmmmm . . . maybe I'm on to an idea....

And this is where the concept started. I decided to take regular games that people seem to enjoy playing and turn them into educational activities. Not only do I just have people play to learn about safety, I use the games to teach them about teamwork, communication, and conflict management. Below are a few examples of the games I use. Some of them I learned many years ago, and you can find them all over the Internet. I just add a business twist to them so they are usable during training sessions.

### The Knot Game

The knot game is a great game to play with 8 – 12 people. To begin, you have everyone stand in a tight circle. Each person then stretches out both arms toward the middle of the circle and they grab the hand of someone else in the group. They cannot have the same person's hand in both of their hands and they cannot have the hand of the person next to them. Once hands are chosen, no one can let go of their partner's hand and the group must find a way to untangle themselves to form a circle again.

I usually play this game twice. The first time I allow all participants to talk and the second time a leader is chosen. The leader must dictate all the moves made by each player and must also be part of the group.

Once both games have been completed, a debriefing session occurs and the players are asked which time was the hardest. Almost 100% of the time, the response is the second time was harder because they were not really allowed to participate. I use this response to discuss the importance of watching out for each other in regard to safety. Many times employees will want their supervisor to be in charge of all safety issues. However, as demonstrated in the Knot Game, the person in charge cannot always see everything that is happening.

We continue to talk about how we can improve communication and the proper way to talk to co-workers if a safety issue is spotted. This activity also helps the supervisor realize they need to be sure that their employees are communicating with them. Sometimes I have worked with supervisors who believe they can do everything on their own, but this activity seems to give them a reality check. It also encourages all employees to help hold each other accountable for their actions in regard to safety. It also encourages them to watch me like a hawk in case I do something that is not correct.

### Safetygories

Many of you have probably played the game Scattergories created by Milton Bradley. Well, I found this game at a yard sale for about one dollar and I loved playing it. When I was working on

safety activities and games, I thought about the game Scattergories and how to convert it into a safety game. For those of you who have never seen the game before, it is a list of categories on one sheet of paper. The object is to list items that relate to those categories based on a pre-determined letter. For instance, let's say the pre-determined letter is "A". For every category you are given, the answer must begin with the letter "A". If the category is "name a fruit", then "apple" could be your guess. However, you only receive points if no one else listed "apple" as the guess. Below is an example of playing the safety version of Scattergories.

Name a Hazardous Material	
Name an item that can be used as PPE	
Name a way to reward an employee for good safety behavior that costs less than \$10	
Name an item found in a first-aid kit	
Name an item that must be locked out if any work is performed on it	
Name a muscle that should be stretched or warmed-up before using	
Name a word that can be used to prevent an accident	
Name a food that is good for you.	
Name a word that is associated with safety.	

The main goal of this exercise is to have your employees talking about safety. From what I have discovered, all the employees playing become very competitive. How does this help you? Well, when they are playing the game, their goal is to get the most points in order to win the game. In order to do this, they are pulling information from safety training they have had for years, because some items are questioned by the facilitator. For instance, let's say "gluteus maximus" was listed for a muscle that needs to be stretched. The group must be able to explain why this is a safety issue and why it is important. And trust me, all the other groups are listening to their explanation to make sure it is legitimate. The groups will even debate with other groups on why the answer should not be counted and they will explain why it should not receive points. I still find it so rewarding when I hear employees talk about some of the answers given during

some of these activities from two or three years ago. It seems to stick with them much more than a video or test ever did.

### Crayons

Ever played the game Pictionary? I've used it in several safety training presentations. With this activity there are actually two parts to the game. The first part is obviously drawing a picture and trying to get your team to guess what the picture is. The second part is answering a question regarding the picture. For instance, I may have the person draw a picture of a fire extinguisher. If their team is able to guess what the drawing is in the amount of time given, then they are given a question to answer for additional points. The question may relate to the various types of fire extinguishers and what they are used for. If, for some reason, your team does not guess what the drawing is, then the other team has an opportunity to steal their points for both the drawing and the question. Some of the items I have the groups draw include the following:

- Forklift
- Eye Injury
- Power lines
- Carpal tunnel
- Steel-toed boots
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You can also have the teams come up with their own words and questions, which is very similar to charades, which leads us to . . .

### Guesstures

This game is another Milton Bradley game that consists of a timer and four cards with safety words listed on them. The player puts the cards into the timer with the easiest item first and the hardest word last. The timer usually lasts for a minute, so the player has this long to communicate all words to the group. However, there is a catch. If the player is not fast enough to retrieve the cards out of the timer once the word is guessed by the group, then the timer will "eat" the card. In addition, the player cannot talk, but I do allow them to make noises.

You can also play this game like you play Pictionary. For all cards that are guessed correctly, the group can have an additional question for more points.

The actual Milton Bradley game already has several words in the deck that relate to safety. For those words that do not, utilizing a label maker can quickly fix this issue.

Guessture words can include some of the following:

- Seatbelt
- Explosion
- Hard hat
- Jumping jack
- Hammer
- Ambulance

### Taboo

Taboo is somewhat similar to the other activities. Participants are divided up into at least two groups and a leader is chosen from each group. The leader is responsible for having the team

guess a particular word. The catch? There are words or phrases that are not allowed to be said by the leader. For instance, the phrase may be “Lost-time injury”. Words that the leader cannot use include the following: Accident, employee, injury, out. If for some reason, the leader uses one of these words, then they must go to the next word and can receive no points for “Lost-time injury.” Usually one minute is provided to try to go through as many words/cards as possible.

### Other Activities

You can turn just about any activity into a safety-related activity. For instance, you can create your own crossword puzzle or word-find game. You can also play a Boggle type game by giving a safety sentence, and then the players come up with as many safety-related words as they can using letters from the sentence. Volleyball games, golf games, baseball and other sports-type games can all be safety related. Safety scavenger hunts can be fun. All it takes is a little imagination. Don’t have imagination? Then challenge your employees to develop something. I did this one time in manufacturing and I was extremely impressed by the results.

Each quarter, we would have a safety week. This week would always have some type of theme. For instance, one quarter we used the theme “safety around the world.” Each day was focused on different areas, such as New Orleans (we had a Mardi Gras parade and talked about drugs and alcohol), Hawaii (we roasted a pig and discussed heat and sun precautions), red neck day, etc. Another day we allowed our third-shift employees to do a safety-related haunted house. As they led me through the plant, they had the employees staged to appear as though they had violated various safety polices and had then become injured – a guy with long hair was stuck in the machine, one guy had use magnets to by-pass the cut-off switches and lost a hand, and the finale was my favorite. At the end of the tour, the forklift driver drove by with a pallet and two legs sticking out from under it. The employees were so proud of themselves and to be honest, I was too.

### **Conclusion**

These activities mean you will have to think outside the box. However, I saw our workers compensation numbers go from over 70 injuries a year to only one. The employees would talk to new hires about different activities we had done over the years. And although they appeared to approach the activities with dread, if we went too long without having one then they would start to complain. When I left and the activities completely halted, the workers compensation numbers went up and employees all seemed to be disappointed.

This process takes longer than what you may be doing now; however, it is well worth it. Good luck!