

Lessons to Learn

Messages are important, but they need to be delivered with the proper tools and teaching methods

It is easy to spot a safety manager's favourite training manuals. These usually come in the form of binders that are stuffed with dog-eared pages, highlighted passages and the Post-It notes referencing the specific ways that a lesson applies to the fleet.

There is a good reason that the best documents are well loved. Any training program will only be as effective as the tools that deliver the content.

But while the manuals are important, an effective training program also needs to consider the fact that everybody absorbs information in a unique way. One driver may analyze an illustration that shows how to measure brake adjustment, but a co-worker might need to apply the knowledge using a physical slack adjuster, pry bar and push rod before any of the details actually stick. Yet another driver may hang on each and every word that a trainer speaks about the theory behind air brakes.

These are not the only needs to consider. Some trainees will have stronger reading skills than others, while the coworkers who are sitting beside them might prefer to absorb information during group discussions.

Adult learners do share some things in common. In general, they will want to know the expected outcomes of the training session, and will be looking for examples of how the information can be applied during a work day. For example, a discussion about Hours of Service regulations may be important, but those who attend a related training session should be told about fatigue management skills that will provide them with more energy, and given the chance to fill out sample logbooks

using data from the trips they would face during a typical duty cycle.

The Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology's Woodland Institute suggests that a successful approach to training will also reflect the specific topic that is being addressed.



A hands-on skill such as measuring brake adjustment, for example, will likely require a hands-on demonstration. But when trainers want to address the attitude that a driver needs to demonstrate when dealing with an irate customer, a role-playing exercise can be the better choice. Every option also needs to reflect practical constraints such as preparation time or training resources that are available. The demonstration concerning brake adjustment may require tools such as a brake board; the role playing exercises will require some extra space at the front of a training room.

When a trainer wants to deliver the same information to every member of a large group, a traditional lecture and a well-crafted PowerPoint presentation can be ideal. (It is certainly a method that ensures the training session remains on schedule.) The challenge is that minds can begin to wander in this environment, and trainees sitting in the back row may simply be wondering how they will apply the information.

When trainers need to deliver the common content from one facility to the next, the use of documents and reading assignments can help to reach out to the drivers, giving each of them a chance to absorb information at their own speed. The added benefit here is that the training material can later be turned into a driver's reference manual. But the quality of the written material will be particularly vital. All of the language should be clear, concise, and reflect terms that are used on a daily basis.

Meanwhile, demonstrations can be useful when trying to explain the way a task such as a pre-trip inspection should be performed, and they give trainees the chance to imitate the skills that are performed. Just remember that memories can be short. Support material such as manuals will be vital to ensure that they have the chance to review content after the fact.

A structured exercise will provide drivers with the chance to interact with one another, and ensure that the content is as meaningful as possible. Although, this can be a time-consuming task and some trainees may dominate the discussions at the expense of those who lack confidence in a crowd.

Case studies offer another way to address real-world scenarios, and will expose everyone to a

wide variety of perspectives and opinions. The challenge here is that some trainees may lack the required problem-solving skills. They may also be lost in the details of a case instead of grasping the overall principles behind these exercises, so instructors will need to carefully place any of the discussions into context.

It is simply a matter of balancing the pros and cons behind every approach to learning, and finding those that are the best fit for the audience.

That may be the most important lesson to learn of all.

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