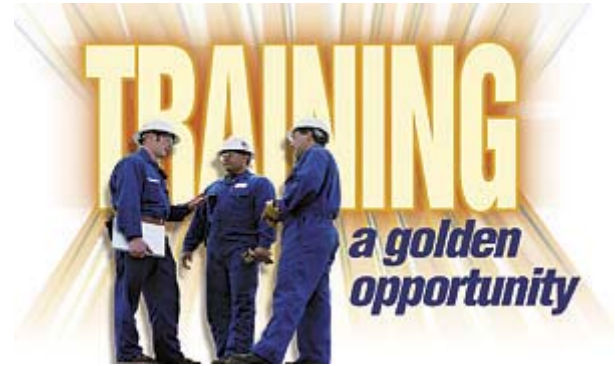


Training: A golden opportunity

By Terry L. Mathis, president of Integrated Performance Technologies, Inc., a safety consulting and software firm in Houston, Texas. Terry can be reached at (800) 395-1347.

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Use compliance classes to reach your strategic safety goals



Lurking inside that required annual safety training is a golden opportunity. World-class safety organizations are increasingly utilizing safety training to build mindsets and skills that are aligned with corporate goals and values. Far from dull, repetitive compliance training, these classes are challenging portals to new levels of safety excellence.

These organizations did not transform their safety training overnight. The transformation began with a new awareness of what could be accomplished when you take your workers out of the workplace and put them in a classroom. The notion that even a repetitious annual rehashing of the same material could serve a double purpose inspired a few visionary safety professionals to experiment with the possibilities. The result has been a series of paradigm shifts that could benefit other companies that have not yet tapped into this potential.

Paradigm shift #1 Training is an opportunity to focus and motivate

The safety manager at a manufacturing site in the Southeastern U.S. was frantically looking for a safety video on HazCom because his trainer was delayed in Atlanta with bad weather. Another safety consultant was at the site helping with other issues and volunteered to deliver the training. The consultant provided the training and met the requirements, but he also used the gathering as an opportunity to further his project with the employees. He solicited their input and stressed the importance of helping the organization reach its goal.

The workers in the consultant's training session gave the class high marks and commented that this was the first time in years they felt the class really accomplished something other than "going through the motions." Several stated specific goals they had for applying the training, and most mentioned being "more serious about safety" after the experience.

The consultant warned that the new levels of enthusiasm would quickly fade if there was no follow-up in the workplace. So the safety pro had the consultant train his supervisors in the same materials and assign them to discuss the materials and vision in weekly toolbox meetings. He also made posters and wrote a letter in the company

newsletter about the training. His plans now include involving the site manager in the next annual training and delivering the message himself.

Far from just “going through the motions,” this site is now planning how to maximize the training experience to sell workers on safety. Information alone does not create enthusiasm. The training included a brainstorming session on how improving safety could benefit both employees and the company. The session included real data from accidents, near misses and unsafe acts that had been reported and measured at the site related to the handling of hazardous materials. In short, the training was applied to the realities of the workplace, and each worker was made aware that strategies were available to prevent accidents.

Paradigm shift #2 Training’s strategic goals go beyond simple compliance

When training is mandated on a specific subject, the organization can analyze its own needs around that subject and use the training to accomplish specific goals. For example, a chemical plant on the Gulf Coast was in the process of modifying its MSDS program to be available on computer throughout the plant. The upcoming hazmat training was modified to inform workers on how to use the new system and employee input was gathered to make final modifications. Workers came out of the training having met OSHA requirements and having accomplished a major safety upgrade for their site.

Such dual use of training is gaining in popularity. Aligning the “required” with the “desired” gives the training focus and quick, logical application. Workers are refreshed on safety material and can immediately apply part of the information upon returning to work.

The inverse of this example is also possible. If the organization finds it necessary to hold training for special reasons, such training can be expanded to meet regulatory goals. The overall effect is a better training experience more closely aligned with the realities and goals of the organization.

The chemical plant, following a company-wide initiative, was moving toward conducting all OSHA-required training through individual computer-based training modules. It is now planning to interrupt this schedule and make at least one or two of the required training modules a live, classroom experience that can be used to further organizational goals.

Paradigm shift #3 Training is ONLY an initiation tool

The traditional view of training as a one-time or periodic intervention must change. Training is best used to initiate a new directive or focus and should be followed by non-training reinforcement and reminders. Annual or semi-annual training is not adequate to help maintain awareness and form new habitual routines. After the initial introduction in the classroom, reminders and refreshers should occur monthly or more

often.

There is also a difference between the classroom and the workplace. On-the-job reminders help to solidify the reality of the materials that can seem theoretical in the classroom. It is vital to translate the classroom words and activities into workplace action that can be assimilated into the work culture and accepted practices.

Paradigm shift #4 Follow-up makes training effective long-term

Innovative organizations are cataloguing their existing tools for reinforcement. Regular meetings, communication tools and even casual conversations are being utilized to maintain focus and attention on organizational goals. The results of such efforts are being measured through perception surveys and audits to see if the desired levels of attention are being accomplished and maintained. In short, organizations are aligning their activities to reinforce what training initiated.

Using mnemonics, or memory devices, is another way to supplement training. Acronyms are one such tool (see "PATH" sidebar below). Another mnemonic is a job aid such as a focus list. For example, a roofing products company prints what it calls a "shirt pocket checklist," which includes three or four safety focus items over which workers have control. Supervisors pass out the shirt pocket lists to workers with a targeted plan to increase the use of safety strategies in certain areas or during certain tasks or conditions. Each worker fills out the card based on what he or she sees fellow workers doing during the shift and turns them in to supervisors. These are supplemented with and compared to more thorough audits to promote and measure progress on safety strategies.

Opportunity knocks

Even required safety training can be an opportunity to further safety in more ways than compliance. Aligning organizational goals to training and changing a few paradigms regarding the use of training can turn even a boring, repetitious necessity into opportunities to give safety focus, meaning and lasting organizational reinforcement.

SIDEBAR: On the PATH to safety

Training can be reinforced through the use of mnemonics, or memory devices, such as acronyms. Ball Corp. in Williamsburg, Va., identified four areas on which to focus employee efforts to improve safety: pace, alignment, tool use and housekeeping issues. Using the acronym PATH, these four safety issues were introduced to the workplace through a series of training classes.

The instructor repeated the mnemonic often and had the class members recall what each letter stood for. Discussions of each helped workers understand why the site

wanted to focus on these four areas. Months after training, almost every employee at the site could recall the four focus items. Signs and posters are rotated to keep awareness high, and safety audits include a reminder to stay on the PATH to safety excellence.
