

From Warm Up to Wrap Up: Twenty-one Great Safety Training Activities

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Introduction

If you have delivered safety training classes in the past, you might be familiar with that awkward feeling that sometimes precedes the start of a safety training class. Your trainees come to class less than ready to learn and you can just tell by the look on their faces that they would rather be someplace else.

We have all heard that “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks” but did you know that you can’t teach an uninterested dog ANY tricks? A great opening can get your trainees interested. In this session, we will talk about two of the most important parts of a safety training class – the opening and the closing or as this title states, the “warm up” the “wrap up.”

The warm up is important because if you do not get the attention of trainees’ in the first few minutes, you will most likely have “lost” them for the class. Once their mind gets preoccupied with other thoughts, it might be very hard to get them back on track. Also, unless you have built some fluff into the beginning of your class (and this is NOT recommended) you will need to have your trainees paying attention from the very start. The sooner you can engage the trainees and get them involved in their own learning, the better the training experience will be.

Warm Up activities are sometimes called icebreakers or openers. Are these the same? The terms may be used interchangeably but they are actually quite different. An icebreaker generally refers to an activity that is in place to get trainees to get to know each other a little better. Many trainees dread this part of the class since they most likely have memories of being asked (or more likely told) to participate in an activity that either embarrassed them, made them feel uncomfortable or had no relation to the class content. For some reason, some trainers believe that these types of activities bring the trainees closer together. Usually, the opposite occurs. The trainee ends up feeling awkward and uncomfortable and this is exactly the opposite of what trainees need to experience in order to learn.

Trainees are most receptive and learn best when they are relaxed, feel safe and feel comfortable in the learning environment. This is why games and activities are great to use in training. If a trainee is having fun, it will be difficult for them to tune out what is going on and in fact, they may be learning without even realizing it.

So are all icebreakers bad? First of all, true icebreakers are really best used with classes that consist of trainees that do not know each other or do not know each other very well. If you are training a group of employees that work together and eat together every day, an icebreaker is probably not needed. If you are training a group of people that may not have ever met, such as the safety personnel from various plants around the country, an icebreaker is a better idea, but be careful. It is still important to make sure the activity is not embarrassing in any way or makes anyone feel uncomfortable. The best type of icebreaker would still incorporate the theme of the class or the general topic of safety if at all possible.

One possibility for such an icebreaker would be a variation of the “Millionaire for a Minute” activity. For this activity, you would need to post the name of the activity and instructions on a flip chart or slide before the trainees start to enter the class room. Your instructions would state:

“If you had a million dollars to spend on safety in your plant, what is the first thing you would spend it on? Be ready to share your answers”

When the class starts, if it is a small enough group, ask individuals to go around the room, and say their name, their company or location, and their “million dollar purchase.” This is a gentler way of asking trainees to do introductions because it allows them to share ideas with others.

Another type of safety icebreaker is called “Rapid Reporter.” With “Rapid Reporter,” you pair up trainees as they enter the room. Again, you should have the instructions posted so trainees should see them when they enter. Your instructions should state:

“Ask your partner their name, location, amount of time in safety, and another question that will get them talking such as “what is the worst accident you ever had to investigate?” or “What is the biggest safety challenge in your plant?”

When the class starts, you will ask each person to take turns giving a “Rapid Report” on their partner, sharing the information they just learned. Again, this removes the need for trainees to share personal information with the class plus helps to avoid an individual giving an excessively long narrative of their life story.

To take a step back even further, consider what happens even before class begins. Is the class welcoming and is there something interesting going on? Consider showing a self-playing slide show of related photos, comics or messages. You could also play music with the slide show or by itself.

Research done at Harvard University has shown that music can provide an emotional connection to improve retention. Music can help trainees to relax and clear their mind. A stressed out trainee will have a hard time remembering anything so if there is a way you can help them to relax, even a little, it will be worth it in the end.

One very important consideration to remember when selecting your classroom music is copyright concerns. A great resource on music and copyright can be found on a website published by Washington State University (<http://tinyurl.com/qglrd>). You may also want to consider purchasing royalty-free music. Do an internet search on royalty-free music and you will quickly

find many sources. If you work for a large corporation, check with our legal department to see if any type of license is already in place. If your company plays music at trade shows, at conventions and even in the workplace, there may already be a multi-use license in place that will cover you but check with your legal department to be sure.

Finally, when planning icebreakers, never ask trainees to do something you would not want to do yourself. Have you ever noticed that most trainees will often do whatever you say? They trust you and believe that your instructions will serve a higher purpose. Do not break this trust by asking the trainees to do something you would not want to do. The key is to know your audience.

Contrary to icebreakers which are generally used only when the trainees do not know each other well, openers should always be used. What is an opener? An opener is an activity that 1) gets the trainees interested, 2) gets the trainees ready to learn, and 3) introduces the topic. Openers should grab attention, establish the climate, set the pace, relax people (including the trainer), and provide a starting point and transition for the rest of the class material. Finally, a good opener should make the trainees understand why they are there and make them really want to learn the information.

Why else should you use a “warm up?” Icebreakers and openers help set the tone and show the trainees from the beginning that you expect participation. If you start the class off with an activity, they will see quickly that this is not the typical training class. Another good reason to use an icebreaker or opener is that the activity will give you a chance to observe trainees. This can be especially useful if you are unfamiliar with the trainees, which might be the situation if you are a consultant presenting at a client’s location for the first time or if your class has trainees from other locations that you do not know. Is there someone who is very hesitant to participate? Is there someone taking charge from the beginning? Is there someone in the class that seems particularly competitive?

When planning your icebreakers and openers, keep the law of primacy and recency in mind. Your trainees are going to remember best what you do first and last (this is why openers and closers are so important). This is also the reason why you must choose your icebreaker or opener carefully. If you choose the wrong activity, you can throw off the rest of your training class.

When you are selecting your opener, think about whether it will break preoccupation. If someone is attending a training class in the middle of the work day, they are probably at least slightly preoccupied with what is going on outside the class. A good opener will get the trainee focused on the topic. Your opening should also get people relaxed and comfortable.

Any openers or closers you select should also allow the trainee to be impressed with themselves and their knowledge. The activity must also be related to the class content and although this can be especially difficult for technical topics such as those covered in safety training, it is not impossible.

Finally, whenever possible, the activity should be fun. Fun leads to positive emotions which are very important in enhancing learning. If someone is sitting endlessly in a lecture, they probably won’t have positive emotions for very long. Fun can help to increase these positive emotions. If someone is stressed or bored or angry, their learning will be inhibited. If learning is positive,

relaxed and engaging, learning will be increased. Fun activities can help to keep the trainee engaged.

The icebreaker or opener should also be shorter or longer depending on the length of the class. If you are meeting for two days, a 30 minute opener would be okay but obviously, a 30 minute icebreaker would not work if the class was only an hour.

Examples of “openers,” or “warm-ups” you can use in safety training classes include:

History of Time – In this exercise you will go around the room and ask each employee how many years of experience they have in their field. For example, if you are training a group of electricians, go around and ask each one how many years of experience they have as an electrician. As the trainees are reporting, write down the answers on the board or flip chart. Add them up and calculate the average. Then, ask questions based on the numbers you calculated. For example, if the total number of years experience is 85, ask how electrical safety was different 85 years ago. If the average time as an electrician was 12 years, ask how electrical safety procedures have changed in the past twelve years. The idea is to get them talking, realize how much they already know and make a smooth transition from icebreaker into the topic of the day.

Ask in the Airplane – This activity is similar to “Boulder Toss” but instead, you ask the trainees to write down one question about the topic on a piece of paper and then, do their best to make the paper into a paper airplane. (Some people will be much better at this than others!). You could also provide paper airplanes for the class and have them add their question. After you welcome your trainees, you will ask them to throw their airplane across the room. Everyone will need to collect an airplane that is not their own. Sometime during the training class, it will be that person’s job to find out the answer to that question. At the end of the class (this is used as a Closer as well), you refer back to the airplanes and go around the room asking every person to read their question and the answer they have discovered.

Crazy Crossword – A crazy crossword is simply a crossword that you are going to do backward. Instead of giving your trainees a blank puzzle with a set of numbered clues, you are going to give them a completed puzzle with a blank set of numbered clues. The trainees’ job is to write an appropriate clue for each word in the puzzle.

Draw It Out – In Draw it Out, you provide drawing paper and markers at each trainee’s work area. On a flip chart or projected on a screen, have the instructions for the activity posted before the trainees enter the room. Your instructions should state that before class begins, trainees should draw a safety poster (including slogan) for an activity related to the class. As the pictures are completed post them on the wall. As an opener, tell the class that you are going to review the posters so everyone can see how much they know already. This review should tie in nicely as an introduction to the class content.

Back to Basics - As your trainees enter a class, tell them you are putting a word related to the class on their back with a sticky note (extra strong PostIt® notes work well with this activity). The trainee’s goal is to find out what the word is by asking yes or no questions of the other trainees. When they figure out the word on their back, they can sit down. This activity works best for refresher classes where employees are familiar with the specific vocabulary to be used.

Grab Bag – As trainees enter the room, ask them to pick an object from a bag (without looking) and then to come up with at least 2 ways that item could possibly be used in relation to the class topic. Again, the instructions should be posted on the board. When class begins, go around the class and ask each trainee to explain. If your class is too large, break the trainees into groups of 5 or 6 first and then have each trainee share their object and uses for it within the smaller group.

Lone Ranger – The Lone Ranger usually sparks a great deal of dialogue. Teams are required. 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 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.

Pictogram Partners - Place a page of pictograms on the desks or tables in the training area. Tell the trainees that they should work with a partner on identifying what each pictogram stands for and that a small prize will be given to the pair that correctly identifies the most.

Shopping for Safety - Before trainees enter the room, set up a “shopping area.” Each trainee should also receive \$100 in mixed bills in fake money as they enter the room. Various items related to safety prevention or corrective action should be staged around the room with a box or basket in front of each. Instruct the trainees that they are to spend their money however they think would be most valuable in preventing accidents in the facility. Each item costs \$100 so if they really feel strongly about a particular item, they can put all of their money towards one purchase and lobby others to contribute funds for that item as well. They can divide their money up among the items on display however they want. After everyone has had a chance to spend their money, go to each item and determine how much was spent on each. The item with the most money allotted to it is the winner. Discuss why some items were given a lot of money and why some were given none or very little. This discussion usually leads to unknown workplace hazards being identified which can help lead to the class material .

Safety Hangman – Safety Hangman is played like the reverse of regular hangman. You start with a hangman wearing various items of PPE. A word related to the training topic should be used in the game. As with regular hangman, a letter is guessed and if it is not part of the secret word or phrase, one piece of PPE is removed. If the letter is part of the secret word or phrase, it is written into the appropriate space. The game continues until either the word is guessed correctly or all PPE is removed.

Safety Sort – 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 recommended that these 30 hazards are typed up as labels and then the labels 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 cards 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.

What about the end? Now that you have opened your class properly, presented the class materials thoroughly with ample opportunities for class interaction throughout the class, it is time to “wrap it up.” The closing, or wrap up, can be very difficult, especially on a long day. Most trainees will know the end is near and will start to have trouble paying attention or focusing but this is one of their key times to reinforce the concepts and tools you just presented. You need a final activity that summarizes what you have just told the trainees, why it is important, and emphasizes the action they will take in the future, i.e., after they have left your training class. Closings can also motivate participants to practice what they learned. Many safety trainers simply end when the class material is covered. One of the worst presentation mistakes you can make is to say “Well, that’s it.” Although most closers involve some type of review, you also do not want to come right out and say “Let’s Review.” The trainees will tune you right out. You know the trainer’s saying – “Tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you have told them.” Closers are reminding the trainees what they just learned.

Unfortunately, without a proper ending, much of the information that you just presented will either not be understood, or quickly forgotten or never used. You can take this thought a bit further by thinking of different topics presented during a longer training class as individual modules that each need their own opening and closing. All of the techniques we discuss here for openings and closings can be used in this manner as well with slight modification.

Some of the best closers involve competition, but be careful. Depending on your particular trainees, you might want to modify the activities slightly so that problems do not occur when very competitive employees are involved.

Closers are as important as openers. Bob Pike, author of *Creative Training Techniques*, recommends that all closers serve 3 purposes: to tie things together; to form a basis for making action plans; and to celebrate the close of the class. Celebrations are probably the thing that seems most unusual to you as a safety trainer. Have you celebrated at the end of a safety training class? Especially if your trainees have just completed a multi-day class or even a class that has met over several weeks, the trainees (and you) deserve to celebrate. Celebrations can consist of small prizes or awards or inexpensively made certificates of completion that you present to each trainee. Celebration activities do not have to be extravagant - just something that brings closure to the class.

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Some closing, or “wrap up” activities you can use to end your safety training classes appropriately include:

A-Z Race – 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 (like flip chart paper) to each team and ask them to draw a line down the middle. They should write A-M down one side and N-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.

Brain Dump – To have your trainees participate in the Brain Dump closer, you first divide the class into teams of 2-4. Give each team a piece of paper and tell them to number it 1-20. (For longer classes, you can have the teams number their pages 1-40 or 1-50). Tell the team they will have 3 minutes to write down as many key items or phrases they can think of that relate to the information just presented (and no word or phrase can be repeated). If they can think of more than 20 items, they should keep going. At the end of the allotted time, check to see which team has the most words or phrases. Share the winning teams list with the class and if time allows, ask the other teams to share words or phrases that the winning team may have missed.

Note to Self – When trainees are asked to write a “note to self” they are mentally reviewing what they learned and making plans for using it in the future. They should write down 3-5 things they will do differently as a result of the class and place their list in a sealed envelope. You can collect the envelopes and return them to the trainees in several weeks to see if they are doing what they said they would. You can also have the trainees swap notes with others in the class and pass on the responsibility for follow up onto their classmates.

TABB – The TABB closing activity is very similar to the “Note to Self Activity” but it involves supervisors as well. After all class material has been presented, each trainee is giving a TABB sheet. This is simply a piece of paper with the letters T, A, B¹, and B² written out largely and boldly. The trainee is to work through each letter and identify: T, or the things that are the most valuable being taken from the training; A, or what actions they will take as a result of the training; B¹, or what barriers they need overcome in order to put their actions into place and B², or what benefits they will see from overcoming the barriers. Each trainee is then given an envelope to place their TABB sheet into. The trainee should address the envelope to their supervisor and then return the envelope to you. After 4 weeks, you should mail the envelopes to the supervisors so that appropriate discussion can occur. You should also be sure to first notify supervisors about this activity so they are prepared when they receive the envelopes in the mail.

Team Test – For a Team Test, you first divide the trainees into teams of 4 or 5. Instruct the teams that their job is to make up a set of ten test questions for another team. After every team has completed their questions, the tests should be collected and then redistributed among the other teams. Teams can work on their test questions as a group.

Take a Spin – Take a Spin requires more equipment and expense than the other closers since you must either make or purchase a spinning wheel. These wheels usually have sections in different colors. You should assign different categories to these colors and different points to each color. Divide the class into teams and allow each team 3 spins of the wheel to accumulate maximum points. After all teams have gone, announce the winning team.

Write on BINGO – Write in BINGO works much like regular BINGO in that the winner must get 5 squares in a row or diagonally crossed off. With Write On BINGO, instead of having a number and letter called, the trainee is free to select the squares they want but the key is that they must answer the question in that square correctly. To make the game more challenging, you can require the trainees to mark off two lines.

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 their 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.

Safety training is one of the only opportunities we often have to get the undivided attention of the employees we work with. It is our responsibility to make this training the best that it can be. By planning for incorporating a great opener and closer, you are taking an important step towards helping your trainees to get the most that they can from your class.

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