

This Training Sucks! Putting the Boots to Bad Training

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Introduction

As soon as workers hear that they are scheduled for training, most immediately slip into “numbness,” similar to that feeling you get when you anticipate getting the flu shot. It is not a pleasant experience, it is a disruption in your schedule, and you are not really sure if it helps anyway. For employers, training is a big gamble, resources are allocated, and the dice are rolled and maybe, just maybe, it will pay off this time and the training will serve its goal.

So much of the training I have witnessed over my 20 years communicating the occupational safety, health and environment message has been nothing short of awful. There seems to be little difference in the quality of training between in-house training and third-party training. Many of the people responsible for conducting training in an organization have inherited this responsibility with little knowledge of what is involved or experience in how to conduct a training event.

Who Is Doing What?

There are a variety of people conducting in-house training with mixed results:

- **Worker turn supervisor:** In many organizations, workers who show leadership in areas of productivity and efficiency are promoted to supervise others. Added to this role is the responsibility to train others and too often they are not prepared for this role. This person approaches from the side of authority and often has little worker buy-in to the message.
- **Injured worker turned safety expert:** It is alarming to see, at any given Occupational Safety, Health & Environment (OSHE) function, the number of people who have entered the profession of occupational safety, health and the environment due to an injury themselves. Often times, they bring a sense of passion and emotion to the conversation but may lack the education and experience necessary to bring about change.
- **Safety Coordinator:** In-house OSHE professionals are another group that conducts training. The challenge here is that many are generalists lacking the in-depth technical knowledge, many lack real world experience and are not trained in the art and science of

communication. The real issue for this group is best illustrated by the phrase “a prophet is not welcome in his own town,” which makes it difficult to bring change.

- **Human Resources:** In some organizations, training is a function of Human Resources. It is their job to figure it out. After all, they are the experts on the human side. Sadly, many human resource people do not have the knowledge, skills and experience to train either.
- **Technical staff:** These individuals often have extensive knowledge in a particular subject matter. They can speak at length on the intricacies of a topic. Too many times, however, their message is flat, resulting from an inability to deliver.
- **Outside Trainers:** Many organizations look to external trainers in their area of OSHE in attempts to bring in the best. This too can be a challenge. Do they know their stuff? Who can keep people awake? Will it produce results?

Why Do We Train Our People Anyway?

In our world of risk, no matter if this risk is to safety, health or environment, training is inevitable. There has been much discussion on controls to be applied to risk, starting from elimination of risk, followed by replacement, by containment, and eventual by training. There is always an element of training to control many of the risks that cannot be controlled by other means. Training is important in a fast-paced, soft-tooled business environment where operating lean and sharing of resources requires less people to do more, requiring fewer people to know more. Training, therefore, is a must, to ensure consistency, to increase efficiency, to share knowledge of a job process, to communicate a hazard, to ensure quality, and to ensure compliance, to name a few. This need to train will never go away. We are stuck with it, and must do something about the negative connotations around such an endeavor.

Training can be defined as a sharing of information to someone else in a way they understand. That is part of it but there is more. Training is communicating in a timely way to a variety of different people in ways that each understands a message that is relevant and important to them. It is the message; it is the way it is communicated; it is the way it is understood; it is the way the information is used; it is the way it contributes to enhance the organizational performance of a company. It is an activity that, if done right and under the right circumstances, brings about desired change.

It is against this backdrop that we recognize a need to raise the bar on OSHE training. Failure to do so creates the following risks. First, we risk being irrelevant as a profession if we cannot produce the results that companies desperately need. Second, in this global marketplace, there is mounting pressure to reduce cost associated with loss of any kind and to trim waste that is not contributing to bottom-line figures. In other words, if training is not saving or making money, it's on the chopping block. Then there is the altruistic argument that if we don't “get it right,” we run the risk of loss, including loss of human life. What is needed is guidance or a template on what good training is like. What are the elements? How do you do it? How do you know you are successful? Where do we begin? The challenge is a tall one, to have a person who not only knows the subject matter but has skill in communication and has the personality to impact others for desired change.

Introducing ANSI/ASSE Z490.1-2009

ANSI/ASSE Z 490.1-2009, “Criteria for Accepted Practices in Safety, Health and Environment Training,” sets the standard. Born from a need to provide the guidance suggested above, the standard provides the needed framework for us as professionals for both in-house and third-party training. It does so in a logical holistic approach that is well thought out and inclusive to the learning process. It stands as a “blueprint” for effective training. It is in utilizing its criteria that “puts the boots to bad training.” Training is like building a house; it all starts by having a plan, a blueprint, and this standard serves that purpose.



The Foundation—Training Program Administration and Management

The foundation of any good training has its roots in management and administration. The standard recognizes that training is not exclusive and has its place and limitations in a comprehensive strategy towards risk reduction. Foundational to a good training event are the resources and efforts of the organization. These resources are described as financial, personnel, and time. Management must be supportive, and this must be visible to the organization at large. There must be clear accountability as to who does what.



Training Program Administration and Management

Adding to the support of the training process is its intention, meaning that it must be designed with results in mind. Attention must be given to the actual needs to be addressed, the learning styles of the individuals, the methodology used to deliver, including the evaluation of a completed project. The stronger the support is from management, the stronger the base for training. The more intention there is in design phase of the training the better the chance for meaningful evaluation. This is the foundation of good training. This base “puts the boots to bad training.”

The Walls—Training Development

Given a solid foundation of structural administration and sound management support, the walls can be added. These are the walls of training development. The elements of training development are complex and very much specific to the project in questions but all begin with an assessment of the needs that training will address. These needs include: What do you want to teach and to whom do you want to teach it? You must fully understand and conduct a needs assessment. You can't meet the need unless you know what it is. This assessment would include if the training required must meet any regulatory requirements.



Training Development

Part of the wall includes learning objectives. Without learning objectives, it is like driving a car without knowing where you are going. How do you know if you have arrived if you're not headed anywhere in particular? Sure, it might be a nice drive and a lot of fun but at the end of it all, you are no further ahead and you have wasted time and money. Learning objectives set out the benchmark. It is what you want your audience to learn, know, or be able to do. These objectives will be the guiding principle in course design and delivery and serve as the foundation for evaluation. These objectives must be reasonable, specific and measurable. They help to form the walls of training.

Course design is also part of the walls. It is what your training will look like. The design of your course starts with your content. This becomes that basic building material for your course. The content may be regulation; it may come from standards or best practices. Good training starts with good content. It is vital to ensure that the content used is the best, most accurate, up to date, and relevant to the jurisdiction available. It must also be geared towards the audience who will receive it.

Instructional materials, including trainer's guides, also serve as wall material for training. Many off-the-shelf training resources are available to choose from with a variety of advantages and disadvantages. Some are very outdated and incorrect. Many are too generic to say anything useful. The other option is to create your own instructional material, which can be time-consuming and expensive. Regardless, instructional material, be it PowerPoint presentations, handouts, or any other materials must be professional looking, accurate in content and understandable to the trainee. This is part of the development of training.

Other practical considerations in the development of training include the environment for training and the time needed to complete it. The physical location is often dictated by the content to be delivered. Some topics allow for a classroom set up; others will require a more hands-on approach in a simulated or real work environment. Some training will require both. It is important that the physical environment be considered when developing training. It should enhance not distract from the content. When it comes to the issue of time allotment, this is a challenge. It is difficult to make a specific time recommendation as it is recognized that we all learn differently, and some need more time than others. Other challenges to time include language and/or literacy barriers, inadequate learning environments, and ineffective teaching approaches and methodologies. However, for the purpose of scheduling, it is helpful to develop an estimate of time needed keeping in mind that it is just an estimate.

The design phase should include a discussion on the qualifications needed for the trainer to deliver the training. Do they need a specific degree or designation? Do they need so many years of experience in a particular field? Must they possess some technical or expert knowledge? Often times, training is designed around the individual's competencies as opposed to who do we need to deliver it and find the person to execute the training based on specified criteria.

Final to the wall construction is the strategy for evaluation of training effectiveness, as well as established criteria for completion of training. This is to say, what does success look like? What is the passing mark? What must the trainee be able to demonstrate? How do we know that training is done? Is there any way to test out opportunities? Criteria for completion are the reason we have finish lines at the end of a race. It is the indicator that we can stop now. In all of this training development, it is also essential to build into the process opportunities for continuous

enhancement of the training and all its sub-component parts. This rounds out the walls of training.

The Roof—Training Delivery

The roof of training is the delivery itself. Under this structure are criteria dealing with the trainer, delivery methods and materials. Trainers must possess subject matter expertise in order to be credible and effective in reaching the stated objectives. Too often, we find trainers delivering training events on so many topics that they are not experts in. They can communicate and work a crowd, everyone has fun, but no one learns anything. They must know what they are talking about. The balancing act is that they must be good communicators too. All too often we hear criticisms of trainers such as, they really know their stuff, but are they ever boring. The message is important and of equal importance are the messenger and their skills of delivery. Trainers must be skilled orators, educators and comedians. Training adults in our current culture is a challenge, and the OSHA trainer must be up to it to be effective in their role in this process.



Topping off the roof is methods and materials. This includes planning and preparation of the event. It has been said that failure to plan is a plan to fail. I would add that failure to practice is also a plan for failure. The delivery must be rehearsed and changes made to ensure training success. This plan should include managing the logistics of the event; the size of the room, venue, breaks, refreshments, and other logistics.

In the delivery, trainers must employ proper materials and methods, keeping in mind the application of adult learning principles and practices. For this training to be effective, communication that is two-way must be incorporated into the delivery as well. This is the roof of training and completes the structure.

Maintaining Your House—Training Evaluation

Once your house is constructed, it needs continuous care. There are two parts to this. First, you must evaluate its condition, and secondly, you must make alterations and repairs based on your findings. This is true for training too. Training should be evaluated; its content, delivery, and effectiveness in meeting the goals. This information is vital, and the enabler to the process of continuous improvement. When you are done with training, you are not done; in fact, you never are. You are in a constant process of evaluation and continuous improvement.

Keeping Records Safe—Documentation and Record-Keeping

Keeping records for your house is important for many reasons. Records kept are warranties, tax bills, blueprints, and other documents that become important for renovations and reworks. Often times, the government needs access to certain records too. This is also true with training. Records that should be kept include design records, revision levels, materials used to develop training, class lists, test scores, and many others, including certificates and diplomas. It is important that your training plan include a list of records to be kept and locations for retention. Keep in mind

that some records may need to be kept confidential, while maintaining quick access in the event that you must produce them quickly. These are some of the things that you must consider when thinking of records.

Summary

The ANSI/ASSE Z490.1-2009 document serves as an outstanding blueprint in the design of good training. Its application should be widespread and utilized by anyone, any company or any organization having the need to train others. Although its relevance is primary to occupational safety, health and the environment, it can apply equally to training adults under any banner. It is this standard and adherence to it that finally “puts the boots to bad training.”

Bibliography

American National Standards Institute/American Society of Safety Engineers (ANSI/ASSE). 2009. *Criteria for Accepted Practices in Safety, Health and Environment Training* (ANSI/ASSE Z490.1). Des Plaines, Illinois: American Society of Safety Engineers