

The Magic of Safety Communication and Fun Safety Meetings

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Are you frustrated that others aren't as passionate about safety as you? Discover the ways to motivate others. Learn how to incorporate fun and great communication skills into all your safety messages. Find out how to raise the expectations, vision, and passion of your workforce, making them safer and more productive. John brings the ASSE a new presentation each year. Don't miss out on what you can learn this year.

Emotion vs. Logic

As with every year, I look forward to sharing with you and our colleagues the latest insights regarding safety communication I have come up with since we last met. If you have a chance to read this prior to the PDC, be sure to come by and say hello. In addition to these insights, I thought I would dedicate these proceedings to the subject that motivates each of us to be successful in communicating safety, passion.

To begin with, let's look at the role emotion and logic play in motivating people to work safely. How often have you ever thought about whether emotion or logic is more motivational to your audience? It turns out that even for engineers, mathematicians, and scientists, etc. emotion drive actions over logic. One of the best tests of this is to study where your company and the other companies around the country spend their advertising and marketing dollars. Advertising is emotional in nature; it is where all the dollars are spent. Why? People have studied what drives human behavior and they are looking to get results. I know that sometimes this flies in the face of what we may believe or would like the world to be but it is important to know your audience and what works best with them. As safety professionals, we constantly remind people that wisdom is learning from other people's experiences. We need to learn from other professionals' experience what motivates people and emotion is it. Marketing, sales, and political professionals all know that emotion will drive actions so that is where they spend their time and money. I wonder how much more effective we would be if we followed their lead and looked for the emotional motivators for our employees.

How many of your safety talks involve an emotional element? The more emotion you add, the more successful you will be in getting the desired behavior and result. Remember, all communication is about your audience so you need to find the element that is emotional to them. For me, safety is all about getting parents home safe to their children. In my case, that is because I have worked with youth since I started in the Boy Scouts of America 46 years ago. For you, it might be something else. For your employees, entirely another item, such as being able to participate in sports or their favorite recreation might do it. Ask yourself, "What would motivate them?"

Passion! Passion! Passion!

For me, all communication is enhanced and driven by passion. It is your passion for a subject that drives how you talk about it. Each one of us can think of someone we know who is passionate about something and they can share information about it with great emotion.

What passion do you have for safety?

What drives you to be successful in your quest to eliminate injuries?

Whose lives or life is most important for you to protect?

The most effective safety leaders have a passion for safety. They are committed to the notion that nobody needs to get hurt. Each of us gets that passion from somewhere in our life. I have had the privilege of interviewing many corporate leaders and there are many reasons people are passionate about safety. What are your reasons? We will discuss them at my session.

The Magic of High Expectations

Quite often, trainers make a fatal mistake by believing that teaching or learning safety is boring. This is tragic because people respond to your highest expectations. If you believe you can make safety interesting and that your audience wants to learn how to take charge of their own personal safety, they will respond accordingly. If you approach safety as boring, then your employees will also treat it as such. Take a moment and do whatever it takes to get yourself in a positive physiological and emotional state so you can do your very best for those you have the privilege to train.

Back in the late sixties, Scientific American completed research concerning the effects of expectations on results of teaching. They observed three classrooms of students that had been tested and found to be as close to equal in intelligence and ability to learn as could be determined. They randomly divided each class into three groups. Teachers were informed that ten students in their class were expected to do above average for the year, another ten were expected to do average and the final ten names were expected to do below average. After one year, they looked at the results and also reviewed the observations of teacher behavior during the year. They found that the students' end of the year grades matched the artificially predicted results. In checking the

observation notes, it had been discovered that the teacher spent a little extra effort with those who were expected to do well and less with the group expected to show below average results. The conclusion was that expectations had a major influence; once again, proving that expectations are critical in achieving outstanding results.

My own speaking experience bears this out. Many times I have had someone tell me before a presentation, "This is a tough group." I proceeded as I always do believing that my audience wants to hear what I have to say and that they are capable of understanding all I have to give them. In almost every case, the person who warned me returned after my presentation and exclaimed how they have never seen the group so cooperative, attentive, and responsive. It is no surprise to me because I expect that level of response from all the groups to whom I make presentations.

Just recently, prior to a presentation for mechanics of a metropolitan transit agency, my assistant overheard one mechanic say to a coworker, "A one-hour meeting, no way, I'll be out of here in five minutes." He had the expectation of not staying and leaving for some made-up excuse. I, on the other hand, saw him as someone who wanted to work without getting injured and therefore he would want to hear all I had to offer and listen to what I had to say because I knew how good my presentation was. My expectation came true. When I was done (right at quitting time, I might add) several people stayed afterwards to talk with me and no one left early.

Making Meetings Special

Everyone has special meetings every so often that have a major focus or something about them that makes them unique. Because they are out of the ordinary, they get a greater level of attention than the average daily, weekly, or monthly safety briefing. In fact, much of my career is being a speaker at this type of meeting. The real secret is learning how to keep people's attention during all the regular meetings.

Step one is to remember that any meeting or presentation where you are presenting safety could easily result in the prevention of an injury. So, all of them are important. While it might not be practical to have more special meetings, you can take your regular meetings and make one element of them different or special. Ask yourself, "What could I do that would be fun, humorous, unique, or entertaining? Who in my organization has talents and skills we could utilize to make our meetings memorable? Remember, think what your employees would enjoy! You need to think as they do.

Step two is to vary what you do at your safety meetings. If you do the same order of things over and over, you will get stuck in a rut. People know what to expect and often tune out what they think they have already heard. That happens in written and spoken communication. For example, my editor missed a typo error last week because as she read the newsletter, she realized one of the sections was one we have used before. She didn't know I had changed part of it so instead of the word beginning we have the word begriming. Perhaps a useful word if you were beginning a grim task but not the right spelling for us. See what you can do to mix it up and keep their attention on your life-changing or life-saving information.

Another advantage of mixing things up is that it keeps you fresh. If you do it the same every time you will get bored yourself and believe me it will make a difference in your effectiveness.