



Safety Scene

Use Narrative Teaching Techniques to Promote Safety

by Molly E. Butz

Narrative teaching is a great way to make sure your students remember what they've been learning.



Tired of toolbox talks? Safety seminars got you snoring? You're probably not alone. Let's face it, safety training is not necessarily fun, but it's definitely the law. OSHA requires that you have ongoing safety training at your facility.

So now for the good news: it doesn't have to be that way! I know what you're thinking: "If I give the machine guarding bullet points one more time, I'm through! They're not even paying attention anymore!" Maybe its time to try something new and spice up your safety presentation with a technique called "narrative teaching."

Narrative teaching can be described more generally as storytelling. And you know as well as I do that everyone has a story to tell. As a matter of fact, your employees probably teach each other every day using storytelling. Can you hear it? "Ya know, I stuck my hand in that vending machine once too, and by gosh could not get the candy for free and it just plain hurt! So you can put your hand up in there if you want to, but I'm telling ya, it's just not worth it for a \$.75 Snickers bar!"

So... maybe it doesn't sound quite like that, but you can liven up safety instruction by throwing in a story or two that pertain to the topic of the day. Telling a story to make a point can help your audience relate to the topic by making it more personal. The list of bullet points is still important, but personalizing it makes it stick. According to Hank Payne, Ph.D., director of the Office of Training and Education at OSHA, "You need a mixed approach to training. There is no silver bullet to solve all your training challenges." It's also a great way to add humor to an often dry subject matter. If you can come up with a funny story, it can help grab attention and get your audience tuned in.

When combined with traditional classroom and hands-on training, narrative teaching adds the personal touch that will help you keep your class engaged and ensure they remember the things they need to keep them safe!

You might also consider asking your "students" if they have any stories to tell. Oftentimes they can offer a perspective or experience you might not have, especially if they've been in an accident or been injured on the job. If your 20-year veteran gives a great example about plate cuts and hand protection, it's likely the rest of the group will listen and learn, and wear their gloves tomorrow. But (there's always a but), be cautious when you open the floor for employees to share their stories; "war stories" can take up a lot of time you need to share the rest of the information, and occasionally you may run into someone that shares an experience you and they both wish they hadn't. The goal is to provide a more interesting learning environment, not to make people in the "class" feel uncomfortable or pressured.

If you ask for a story and heaven forbid no one has anything to share, you can ask questions to get the discussion started or spark a person's memory. While general questions can lead to answers that are completely contrary to the training you are trying to provide, formatting your questions to retrieve a specific answer can be easy. Modifying a question like "what are the safety precautions you take when driving a forklift?" to "do you know someone who avoided a serious injury because he was wearing a safety belt while driving a forklift?" will be more likely to elicit a

at a glance

- ❑ Telling a good story, a technique called narrative teaching, can make your safety training meeting come to life.
- ❑ Look for interesting "props" that can drive home points in both a humorous and graphic manner.
- ❑ Always ask specific questions to get training interaction started. Avoid "war stories."

Richard says: I was once involved in a safety meeting where the discussion turned to saw safety. The speaker reached into his bag and pulled out a "Halloween-type," realistic looking severed rubber hand and tossed it on the table. Before the initial shock wore off and while he still had everyone's attention he talked about how quickly one of them could be severely hurt. He related a story of an employee at a different company who lost a hand in a saw accident and stated he wanted each of them to keep both of their hands so they could hold on to the ones they loved. Then he discussed the saw safety guidelines. I'd be willing to bet that everyone who attended that meeting still remembers the rubber hand, the story and the guidelines for safe saw practices, and has a renewed determination to keep both their hands safe and intact.

case study

response in line with your training.

Right about now the "Case Study" box might be grabbing your attention. If so, you're probably also thinking, ah-ha, this is an example of narrative teaching, and you'd be right. It's a pleasure to be working with WTCA Insurance Expert Partner Rich Langton of Bowermaster & Associates. From time to time he and WTCA's other insurance broker partners will be injecting structural building component industry case studies that pertain to the topic for the column. They will work as a teaching tool because you will be able to see how incidents affect other people in our industry and also learn about their resolution to the situation.

As you can see, storytelling and using props as described in the Case Study above can be an extremely useful teaching tool. It can be used to capture attention; it can be used to mentor; and it can even be used to fetch a laugh. Most importantly, it's a great way to make sure your students remember what they've been learning. A story will remain with your employees long after the textbook training is over. Stories touch the mind and the heart.

Make sure your next training session isn't "just another safety lecture" from the safety police. When combined with traditional classroom and hands-on training, narrative teaching adds the personal touch that will help you keep your class engaged and ensure they remember the things they need to keep them safe! **SBC**

To pose a question for this column or to learn more about WTCA's Operation Safety Program, contact WTCA Staff at 608/274-4849, email wtca@woodtruss.com, or view the Operation Safety demonstration online at www.wtcatko.com.

tips for effective narrative teaching:

1. Avoid stories that "require" offensive language.
2. Political or religious issues are off-limits.
3. Be conscious of content that may be interpreted as sexual harassment.
4. Be sensitive to issues related to weight and age.
5. End on a positive note.
6. Make sure your stories relate to the topic.
7. Ask specific rather than general questions.
8. Use humor where appropriate.
9. Be careful not to belittle or embarrass anyone.

[SOURCE: *Occupational Hazards*, April 2005, by Occupational Safety and Health Educator Marcie Thobaben]



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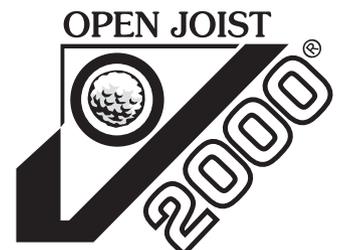
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