

Training Adults in Ergonomics, Safety and Health

You're knocking yourself out training, meeting all compliance needs and more, but are your trainees learning? According to studies of adult learners, your trainees may be paying a lot less attention to vital ergonomics, safety and training than you think.

Most studies of adult attention spans agree that for most adults the outer limit is about 20 minutes. The longer a training session continues, the shorter the attention span becomes.

One study indicates that after an hour of uninterrupted lecture, attention spans can drop to 3 or 4 minutes punctuated by long periods of inattention.

The personality of your trainer is as vital as your training content. Trainers who stand in one spot and read the slides are very boring and soon eyes close and the snoring process begins.

You have to wonder—and worry—about what trainees might have missed during those lapses in attention. Was it the essential piece of information that could have prevented an accident?

Shrinking Attention Spans

Many educators and training experts believe that attention spans actually are shrinking because we've become such a visual society. Just watch TV with the sound off for a few minutes. The images change every few seconds. Take a look at the electronic games that kids grow up on today, and think about e-mail, texting, and so many other recent technological developments.

Information comes now in short, fast bursts. So trainees—especially the younger ones—may tune out anything that requires too much focus for too long.

How to Keep Their Attention

Here are seven strategies that can help you grab and hold trainees' attention during those all-important safety training sessions:

1. Plan training sessions in reasonable chunks. Say you're going to train on a particular hazard, the procedures necessary to prevent injuries, and the required PPE.

Rather than delivering information about all three points in one continuous stream, break it up into three chunks interspersed with interaction between trainer and trainees and among trainees.

2. Use self-paced materials composed of short modules. Make sure each module offers interactive opportunities as well as opportunities to go back review information covered. Keep the modules interesting, visually appealing and clever.

2. Include interactivity when you lecture. For instance, talk for a bit and then discuss what you've just covered, encouraging lots of trainee participation. Offer some anecdotal information to support the facts.

Have a question and answer period between training points, or divide large training groups into small groups to discuss issues or complete training exercises. Don't be afraid to make the attendees laugh, they will learn.

You can use quizzes and problem-solving exercises to challenge trainees and make them think about what they're learning. Or give trainees a chance to practice what they've learned for a few minutes before proceeding to the next point.

4. Think about attention span when planning training, especially if your training group is composed largely of younger workers who have grown up in the "electronic age." Realize that they may have shorter attention spans than older workers, and take that into account. Use anecdotal stories that everyone can relate to and understand.

5. Be clever and use a combination of training techniques. For instance, give a brief 5-minute introduction, show a short training video, have a discussion about key points, give a quiz, and then provide a handout and have a short review. Mixing it up helps keeps trainees alert and engaged.

6. Allow rest breaks during long training sessions so that trainees have a chance to get up and move around, have some water, and get their blood flowing for the next round.

7. Let trainees know up front that they'll be assessed to learn their knowledge gains. Tell trainees at the beginning of the session that there will be a quiz or assessment at the end of the session, which they will be expected to pass based on the quality of the training. This will encourage them to pay attention during the session and ask questions about any information they don't understand.

In order to have a successful training, the information being delivered must be understood and retained by all trainees. If they sleep, they lose and you lose. Why spend the money to create boredom. Ensure the trainer is energetic, well informed and has a good sense of humor.