

An example of Affective Safety Management™

by Lyndon Shearman Former Member of the Institute's Board of Governors.

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What follows is an example of how the IIRSM's new Safety initiative "Affective Safety Management" can be used. A member of the IIRSM's Board of Governor's, Lyndon Shearman, explains how he applied accelerated learning techniques to a health and safety training course for the oil company Shell.

When Shell wanted a NEBOSH Certificate course to be run in-house for people from their Stanlow Refinery and Cheshire Innovation Park, they emphasised that their prime objective was to give people the confidence to deal constructively with health & safety issues in the workplace. They had strong views that the course should be learner-centred, and that the learners should be actively involved, and not merely preached at.

My first step was to redesign the course delivery – the content remained the same - to engage the learners' emotions. Real learning, I believe, takes place at an emotive or non-conscious level. Merely presenting information at people only engages the rational part of the brain - the neocortex - and such learning is shallow and seldom retained in the long term. It was also important to engage all the senses, for a full and deep understanding of the subject matter to take place.

First day

On the first day of the course, the delegates found themselves sitting in a room with toys on the table, including fancy paperweights, Newton's cradles, stress balls, and stainless steel bowls full of brightly coloured sweets. It took a little time for them to realise that they could handle the toys and eat the sweets, but once they did there was no stopping them. Following introductions, the very first thing the group did was to take a mock NEBOSH exam. They did this collectively, pooling their knowledge, and the idea was to show them how much they already knew and take away some of the fear of examinations which delegates often bring. It also helped the group to get to know each other.

Engage the Learners

From then on, learning took place by a variety of exercises designed to engage the learners with the comprehensive course notes, which had been provided. For example, in three teams, they had fifteen minutes in which to consult their notes and produce five questions based on a particular subject area. Team A then used their questions to query Team B, while Team C refereed. Then they rotated, until each had been quizzed and gained a score. The energy that the teams put in was impressive, and their questions were very searching. Other activities had teams producing mind maps, writing poems and songs on syllabus topics, while one team even produced a permit-to-work for removing my sideburns using oxy-acetylene cutting gear!

It is not usual to hear NEBOSH delegates roaring with laughter as they explore the ramifications of the Workplace (Health Safety & Welfare) Regulations, but that is exactly what happened as they tested each other with searching questions. One delegate remarked “I’ve had so much fun I can’t believe I’ve learned anything.” As Lyndon remarked, it is surely a damning indictment of the usual approach to training that fun and learning are seen as incompatible. What was remarkable was that at no point in the course were acetates or electronic presentations used. If the learners wanted pictures they drew them, and shared them. Breaks were frequent, and the days ended at around 4pm, on the basis that tired people do not learn. The course was structured in two and three day blocks, so the learners could try out what they had learned in their workplace.

Sustainable Learning

The group sat their NEBOSH examinations in early June, with nine out of ten of the group passing, while six of the group received the higher grade of credit.

We leave the last words to Colin Hunt, HSE Manager at Shell’s Stanlow Refinery.

“This was sustainable learning. Six weeks after the course I can ask our people questions about what they learned, and they can give me detailed answers.

They have also learned that they each have different learning styles, in other words they have learned how to learn. This is what I mean by sustainable learning. And we now have 25 other people who want to attend a course like this, simply on this basis of what their colleagues have told them.”

If you want to find out more about Affective Safety Management, please write to or e-mail Julie at the Institute on julie_s@iirsm.org , or e-mail Lyndon at little_dragon@blueyonder.co.uk