

Even superbly designed and delivered training can often achieve very little, warns **Tim Marsh**, because important psychological obstacles that also need to be systematically addressed are often overlooked.

IMAGINE TWO YOUNG SAFETY PROFESSIONALS MAKING THEIR WAY through the industry. They are about to have one of the year's most important conversations from their point of view. This needs to be a cold 'walk and talk' conversation with an unknown pair of potentially hostile and unresponsive individuals. The least experienced one leaves it to his more confident colleague to approach the pair in question and raise the issues that need to be raised. Luckily, he's skilled at the techniques required, and the girls in the club in the Spanish holiday resort respond well. . .

Let's call the confident one Terry (are you old enough to remember *The Likely Lads*?) He raises his glass to the girls as he returns and they raise theirs back, twinkling and smiling at him. "How did you do that?" asks his friend (let's call him Bob. . .or perhaps Tim!) Terry explains some basic techniques about being confident and friendly but not overdoing it, about the importance of eye contact and showing positive interest in what's said, even if you have to pretend ("but you've always hated Bristol, and you haven't even got a sister, let alone one who's a hairdresser too!"), about the importance of complimenting the plain one on how stunning she looks tonight and the pretty one on her wit and perception, then backing off in good time while the going's good.

"I explained you had to ring your brother who's ill, which is a big worry, given his important audition coming up, and also that you need to check on your cat. Worried sick about that poorly cat, you are!"

"But I haven't got a cat."

"Well no, but the one on the left has a small 'Cats Protection League' pin on her blouse. So, let's try that club down the road and we can always come back if that doesn't work out. But this time *you're* doing the talking. . ."

Please forgive the slightly sexist 70s sitcom reprise to try to start the article in a gentle way. However, it is intended to lead to two very important questions. First, when the young safety advisors reach the next bar, how likely is young Bob to enjoy similar success, despite his recent crash course in technique? Can I suggest that – outside of Hollywood films, where the stunner with a heart finds a timid and gauche approach endearing – he's unlikely to get very far. And the even more important second question – the nub of the matter: in the absence of coaching, practice and the confidence of having achieved some success when trying these techniques out – how likely is Bob to be any better at this on the following year's holiday?

### Embedding change

Effective training is about far more than simply briefing people in what needs to be done. Basic education is merely about knowledge but *training* should be about embedding a change of behaviour. The world-renowned US safety culture expert Scott Geller<sup>1</sup> uses the same jokey illustration of this point in every presentation he gives, when he asks: "How would you feel if your teenage kids' school announced that, next week, they weren't going to be doing sex education but sex *training*?" Quite! It really isn't the same thing at all.

The Vroom model of individual motivation<sup>2</sup> clearly explains why so

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# Go forth and multiply

many well-designed and delivered training courses fail to achieve any long-term benefit for the organisation. Often, this will be despite some really excellent ‘happy sheet’ scores. Our adaptation of this model says that in order to understand an individual’s motivation level to do anything we need to multiply four factors. (Please note that the fact that it’s a *multiplication* is key here. It’s not an addition, where you can ‘bank’ a score, like on ‘Who wants to be a millionaire?’ it’s a multiplication, so a low score anywhere means a low score overall.) The four factors are:

- “What do you want me to do?” (of course)
- “Why do you want me to do it?”
- “Do I feel I have the skills to do what has been requested competently?”
- “Do I value the outcomes these behaviours are aimed at achieving?”

### What do you want me to do?

Clearly, if a workforce is confused as to what it is supposed to do then a range of different behaviours will occur. If you want me to lift safely, then don’t tell me to ‘make sure you don’t put your back out’ but show me the principles of kinetic lifting. Likewise, ‘make sure you step down safely’ will, to many, simply mean ‘jump if you want, but don’t trip’.

We need to be concise, precise and clear in our instructions and then, with a mindful mindset, use active listening techniques to confirm genuine understanding. Confirming they’ve signed the attendance sheet isn’t the same thing.

I recently came across an example of a simple communication that led to two very different behavioural outcomes, owing to culture and the subtle nuance of language. Following a merger, a client company has two broadly similar operations – one in the UK and one in Germany. Following a basic risk-management review it was strongly recommended that senior teams didn’t fly to meetings on the same plane.

Now, in the UK, we tend to view recommendations as something to do if we can. In Germany, however, the translation essentially means “direction”, and these are nearly always followed. At the senior management session I ran, it transpired that none of the dozen or so Germans had caught the same flight – but the same certainly wasn’t true of the UK-based managers!

Cue Bob and Terry (and quoting directly from a classic episode!):

“You want me to go and talk to those two?”

“Yes!”

“. . .and ask if they’ll join us for a drink?”

“Yes!”

“You want me to do it now?”

“Yes – now!”

“Oh hell. . .”

### Why do you want me to do it?

In his Allan St John Holt Memorial Lecture earlier this year, Paul Thomas referred to the vital importance of all submariners on his nuclear subs knowing not just what to do but also being crystal clear as to why they are doing it. In this extremely challenging environment it is, of course, vital that all personnel can respond with speed and agility to any unforeseen event. Fully understanding the rationale behind tasks is, of course, key to this – described by Mei-Li Lin, in these pages, as “operating dexterity”.<sup>3</sup>

Undertaking tasks that fill folders and files and harvest ticks and signatures is all very well but not if they become an end in themselves. As Mei-Li Lin stresses, the “why” should always have been explained clearly at training, along with the pros and cons of alternatives. We need to train employees to always be able to ask the

question: “What exactly am I trying to achieve with this task?” – a key element of the ‘mindful’ mindset I have written about in these pages before.<sup>4</sup>

The reviews of almost all major incidents are littered with examples of audits and checks that had been undertaken apparently effectively just prior to the incident but without picking up what they were supposed to be looking for. For example, reviewing the paperwork and insurance audits on the Permit-to-Work and deluge systems on Piper Alpha would have been erroneously reassuring on 5 July 1988.

As well as intellectual understanding, subjective motivation is also addressed here. When was the last time you did anything with a glad heart when told “because I say so!”? The use of data and illustration is therefore vital here. We simply mustn’t send delegates off half-cocked and resentful. Here’s an example: some recent research from the US shows clearly why the line management “safety walk and talk” can achieve little if it is done badly. The research shows that four things correlate with these interactions:

- The greater the number of conversations undertaken pro-actively, the fewer the injuries;
- The greater the breadth of individuals involved, the fewer the injuries (as they increase manpower, offer fresh insight, and enhance shared understanding);
- The greater the number of ‘100-per-cent safe’ reports, the greater the number of injuries! (There is always something to find, so ‘all fine’ means you just weren’t looking hard enough, or perhaps not asking the right questions);
- The greater the number of repeat items found, the greater the number of injuries (because we’re just generating symptom-level ‘crap lists’ and doing nothing about them at a root-cause level, so they recur – or, even worse, we’re not getting the lists closed out at all).

This is a really useful piece of research to quote when training a group of supervisors in the mechanics of undertaking a learning-focused ‘walk and talk’. We need to be able to say to our trainees – especially the ones who walked in to the training room resentful and bemused as to why they are there: “That’s why you all need to do them – head-office staff, too – and why you need to do them well. If you don’t do them, then we will hurt more people. End of story.” (Or, in Manchester, where I’m writing this, simply: “End of!”)

Follow this up with: “So now we’ve got that straight, let’s practise. . .”

### Can I do it without embarrassing myself?

Meanwhile, back with Bob and Terry. . . when they reach the next bar and Terry pushes Bob forward, is the latter primarily thinking: “This is a good opportunity to meet a girl!” or even: “It won’t work but it’s a good learning opportunity?” It’s far more likely he’s thinking: “Oh hell, I’m going to make a right fool of myself here!” and suddenly darts, or pool – or even an early night – become hugely attractive.

The same is true in work, of course. Most people will, if at all possible, avoid tasks that they’re wary of. It’s just human nature. In a former life, I had a job I hated (and wasn’t suited to) before I retrained as a psychologist. I remember a supervisor once saying: “Tim, I really don’t need another coffee and can I remind you that coffee-making isn’t an item on the appraisal you’re getting from me next month!”

So, although on – for example – a behavioural analysis course we need to practise “five why’s analysis”, “ABC analysis” and other “Just Culture”-based techniques, often these aren’t the problem. A Just Culture-based conversation is nearly always an opportunity to learn, empower and empathise, and most trainees will be pretty comfortable having a crack at that. Where they more often struggle is with the soft skills, such as ice-breaking and assertion techniques.

## “The line manager’s ‘safety walk and talk’ can achieve little if it is done badly, so training supervisors to ensure it is learning-focused is vital”



The prospect of giving a toolbox talk to even a group of hard-faced contractors is another example. It isn't all that scary if you're an experienced and competent presenter but, technically expert or not, it can be utterly petrifying if you're not – and we've all seen these vital communication events reduced to a mumbled shambles. (Not surprising, when studies show that about 25 per cent of the general population rate speaking in public as more frightening than dying!)

I absolutely guarantee that the vast majority of readers of this article who have a 'walk and talk' process find that even though the time is available (if it is – but that's another matter), they aren't done as frequently as they should be. Similarly, that even if these walk and talks are done, then many are done as quickly as possible. In previous articles<sup>4</sup> I've discussed the vital importance of proactively looking for where the safe way is uncomfortable, as, where it is, many will try to work around it. The same principle applies where supervisors are uncomfortable about talking to colleagues – many will simply work around it if they can.

So, we know what to do and we know why it's important. Better than that, we've had a chance to practise the skills we're not comfortable with in a safe environment. We have some fabulous happy-sheet scores for the files. Unfortunately, everything is still up for grabs, as we still have to *multiply* what we now have by a final factor – which is: does the individual value the outcome?

The bad news is that, when looked at two years from now, I reckon about 80 per cent, or more, of the efficacy of any training course is determined by this fourth factor, regardless of how well-designed and delivered the course was.

### Do I value the outcome?

I value safety. If you're reading this, then it's highly likely that you do, too. We're a self-selecting sample. Unfortunately, little Jerry Snarkson has a very large and admiring fan base, and many of our front-line supervisors read Dicky Littlejohnny in the *Daily Mail* and think of us as the “elf and safety” Gestapo. This constituency will need to be taught that the Snarkson view (nearly everyone will get away with it and it's a hard world – accidents happen) simply isn't good enough.

We know that this isn't good enough for the ones that don't get away with it, or for the company's long-term viability, either.

However, it's perfectly understandable that the typical supervisor doesn't understand the genuine cost of accidents, or the laws of Heinrich's Triangle.

Obviously, as the use of data and illustration (as discussed under factor two, above) is vital here, and we need inspirational speakers like Ken Woodward, Jason Anker and the late, great Ian Whittingham at this point to get their attention in the short-term. However, in the medium-to-long term it's not enough to inspire these employees (or, as Scott Geller so clearly illustrates, even educate them). Instead, they need to be systematically taught in an ongoing way to value the behaviours we request on our training courses.

This comes from their inclusion on formal appraisal – and not just ensuring they are included but ensuring that safety items are given the same weight as productivity items. (Tape an appraisal and watch the body language when we get to the safety items – it often looks like a half-time kick-about rather than the real thing). Ad-hoc follow-up is arguably even more vital, and this means we need to make the effort to watch out on a daily basis and note when these behaviours are done well, so that we can praise them. We also need to watch out for opportunities that weren't taken and follow that up with a swift. . . well, some timely and constructive feedback.

This fourth factor is summarised by an experienced safety manager thus: “If the behaviours requested on the course are not considered career-enhancing in the smoke shack three months after the course, then you've wasted your money!”

### Conclusion

Training experts point out that we need to practise something around 30 times to achieve a basic mastery of the behaviour. Think of any sport or hobby: how many times do you need to practise it before you stop saying “I am learning to . . .” and start saying “I am a . . .” (judo player, golfer, Samaritan)? The experts point out that genuinely embedding it as a refined skill takes *hundreds* of times. So, two or three timid attempts don't even get you to first base!

Therefore, to recap, it isn't just being taught what to do. It's just as important that we know why and how to do it competently, and that the organisation systemically ensures, through appropriate feedback, that we practise these behaviours enough to make them an embedded

part of what we do and who we are. Obviously, we can conclude here with reference to Geller's thoughts on individual and organisational "DNA" and "the way we do things around here".

But let's talk about Terry and Bob instead – with, in the analogy, the frequencies, timescales and transferable skills entirely intentional!

Imagine Terry takes Bob out most weekends in the year between holidays. He encourages him to practise, coaches him, and gives him timely and constructive feedback. Now, how much more likely is it that, next time, the first holiday 'walk and talk' is something that Terry can safely leave to Bob?

You might well be reading this article in the middle of the Olympics, so a final related thought: how many of the competitors made it to the Games simply by being inspired by watching the film *Chariots of Fire*? It might have inspired the sweat, hard work and years of commitment required to reach world-class levels. But inspiring

you to dig out the running shoes is all it can do. Effective training has never been a one-off event. ■

## References

- 1 Geller, E S (2001): *Psychology of Safety Handbook*, Lewis Publishing
- 2 Vroom, V (1995): *Work and Motivation*, Josey-Bass
- 3 Lin, M-L (2012): 'Tales of the unexpected', in SHP May 2012 – [www.shponline.co.uk/features-content/full/behavioural-safety-tales-of-the-unexpected](http://www.shponline.co.uk/features-content/full/behavioural-safety-tales-of-the-unexpected)
- 4 Marsh, T (2010): 'It's a kind of magic', in SHP Sept 2010 – [www.shponline.co.uk/features-content/full/it-s-a-kind-of-magic](http://www.shponline.co.uk/features-content/full/it-s-a-kind-of-magic) – and 'Cast no shadow', in SHP Jan 2012 – [www.shponline.co.uk/features-content/full/safety-leadership-cast-no-shadow](http://www.shponline.co.uk/features-content/full/safety-leadership-cast-no-shadow)

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There are ten questions in all, and the answers can be found at the end of the online version of this article at [www.shponline.co.uk/features-content/full/cpd-article-go-forth-and-multiply](http://www.shponline.co.uk/features-content/full/cpd-article-go-forth-and-multiply) To learn more about CPD and the IOSH approach, visit [www.iosh.co.uk/membership/about\\_membership/about\\_cpd.aspx](http://www.iosh.co.uk/membership/about_membership/about_cpd.aspx)

## QUESTIONS

### 1 Which of the following is *not* a factor in an adaptation of the Vroom model of individual motivation?

- a. Do I have the skills to do what has been requested competently?
- b. What do you want me to do?
- c. Why do you want me to do it?
- d. What will happen if I don't do it?

### 2 What would be an effective way of helping prevent back injuries?

- a. Showing trainees a general DVD on manual handling
- b. Telling trainees to be careful when they lift
- c. Showing trainees the principles of kinetic lifting
- d. Giving trainees examples of back injuries

### 3 Understanding why tasks have to be done is described in a previous article by Mei-Li-Lin as

- a. Being ambidextrous
- b. Operating efficiently
- c. Operating effectively
- d. Operating dexterity

### 4 We need to train employees to always be able to ask the question:

- a. What am I trying to achieve with this task?
- b. What will my supervisor say if I don't achieve this task?
- c. Can I get away with not doing this task?
- d. What reward will I get if I do this task?

### 5 Research on 'safety walk and talk' tasks has shown that:

- a. The greater the number of conversations undertaken, the greater the number of injuries
- b. The greater the range of individuals involved, the greater the number of injuries
- c. The greater the number of 100-per-cent safe reports, the greater the number of injuries

- d. The greater the number of recurring issues, the fewer the number of injuries

### 6 Faced with a task they are wary of, most people will, if possible:

- a. Avoid doing the task
- b. Complain about doing the task
- c. Openly refuse to do the task
- d. Carry out the task anyway

### 7 The fourth factor in the adapted Vroom model of motivation is:

- a. Will the training impress my supervisor/manager?
- b. Do I value the outcome of the training?
- c. Will I earn a bonus from undertaking the training?
- d. What exactly do I have to do as a result of the training?

### 8 Formal appraisals of employees should include:

- a. Safety being mentioned somewhere in the process
- b. Focusing exclusively on safety
- c. Focusing only on events where safety requirements weren't complied with
- d. Giving safety items the same weight as productivity items

### 9 Training experts maintain that we achieve a basic mastery of behaviour by practising it:

- a. At least twice
- b. More than a hundred times
- c. About thirty times
- d. At least half a dozen times

### 10 Effective training is achieved by:

- a. Listening to inspirational speakers
- b. Being taught what to do, why and how
- c. Being told what to do, and what will happen if it's not done
- d. Being given detailed instructions