



WHAT TYPES OF LEARNERS ARE YOUR EMPLOYEES?

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Effective safety training complements three basic learning styles. Just as employees have different working styles, they also learn in different ways.

- Some are **visual learners**, who learn best by seeing. This type of employee generally learns best when learning involves the written word. They like to read key points, handouts, computer-assisted training programs, and other written materials. They like to watch safety training films, see demonstrations, and look at charts, graphs, and diagrams. And they probably take notes to remind themselves later about what they saw.
- **Auditory learners** like to listen. They generally learn best through lectures, group discussions, and self-directed training with an audio feature, such as a click and train Power Point presentation.
- **Hands-on learners** learn best through practical instruction. They learn by doing. For these folks, any kind of theory always needs to be backed up by a healthy dose of practice. On-the-job training is usually the most important part of the learning process for these employees.

Of course, most training groups include all three kinds of learners. For safety training to reach all employees, it's best to use a mixture of training techniques to appeal to different learning styles. That way there's always something in there for everybody, and all trainees will be able to learn what they need to work safely.

Individual learners vary in other ways too. You should keep in mind that in addition to different learning styles, your employees are different in other ways, for example:

- Some trainees have confident personalities and thrive on challenges. Others are unsure of themselves and may feel threatened if training is too challenging or if they don't get enough support.
- Some are talkers and love to participate in discussions. Others prefer to sit in the back and listen, only contributing if called on.
- Some are goal-oriented and readily relate to training goals. They probably set their own learning goals as well. Others, however, may need help setting and achieving learning goals.
- Some trainees are independent and like to learn by themselves. Give them a click and train Power Point session, computer-based training unit, or an instruction manual and they are happy to learn on their own. All you have to do is follow up with an evaluation to make sure they've got it right. Others may lack the discipline or motivation to learn by themselves and need the interaction and support of a group to learn effectively.

And don't forget that most adults are self-directed learners. They tend to learn what they want, when they want, and how they want. They also tend to approach learning in a task-oriented or problem-solving way, just as they approach everything else in their lives. What's more:

- *They want to know why they're being asked to learn something.* In other words, training needs to be practical and immediately relevant to their work. They want to know how it will make them safer, more efficient, or more successful on the job.
- *They want to be able to draw on past experience* (which many trainees have in abundance) and integrate new information and skills into what they already do.
- *They want positive reinforcement and feedback* from trainers to let them know how they're doing and to keep them motivated.
- *They want to be successful.* So it's up to you to make sure that they don't fail and that they come away understanding and are able to use everything they need to learn from training.