

# Beyond The Cab

The only safety management newsletter dedicated exclusively to addressing injury prevention and workers' compensation cost control for trucking companies.



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## Making Safety Meetings More Effective

Safety meetings are often considered key to safety management in trucking companies. The SafeReturns study found that virtually all fleets hold regularly scheduled safety meetings with mandatory attendance for drivers (ATAF 1999a). Another study found that just more than half of small trucking companies (those with less than 10 trucks) hold regularly scheduled safety meetings, and nearly 90% of large trucking companies hold such meetings (Stock 2001).

Generally the frequency of these meetings varies from quarterly to annually. Because it's so difficult to get all (or even most) of the drivers in a single place at a single time, some safety directors resort to conducting several identical safety meetings within a short period, each time capturing as many drivers as possible. Others conduct multiple meetings within a year, and require drivers to be in attendance for a minimum number of those meetings. Still others tie an incentive to driver attendance at safety meetings. Some trucking companies have small enough fleets that one-on-one meetings with drivers are possible.

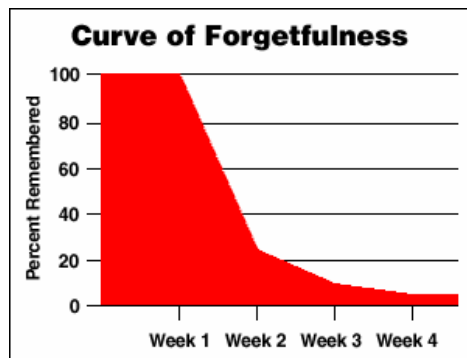
If the safety meetings at your company are like most, they include a mix of DOT compliance, accidents or incidents occurring recently, vehicle maintenance and inspection, defensive driving, driver health and lifestyle (e.g., diet), winter driving, driver complaints and concerns, and non-driving topics such as loading dock practices and hazardous material handling.

But how do we make them more effective?

To answer that question, we must first define the objective of the safety meetings. Although you may have other (additional) objectives, the objective of safety meetings (for the purpose of this article) is "to influence the behavior of drivers (and other employees) in such a way as to reduce unsafe acts."

One of the difficulties faced when attempting to influence driver behavior, to the point that unsafe acts are reduced, is that our brains are more like sieves than steel traps. What goes in doesn't always stay there.

In 1885, a researcher Thomas Ebbinghaus did a study on people's ability to retain information. He called the results of the study "The Curve of Forgetfulness." Ebbinghaus found that a person forgets 75% of what he or she has learned in the previous week. After three weeks, he/she forgets 90%. After four weeks, he/she forgets 95%.



Additionally, his study found that the brain retains information it considers important to the individual and "forgets" information deemed less relevant.

It's crucial for safety directors to understand the implications of these two findings from that 120 year old research project.

First, compare the frequency of your safety meetings with "The Curve of Forgetfulness" illustrated on this page. If you are relying upon safety meetings to influence the behavior of drivers (even if they're being conducted quarterly) you are very likely not having the impact upon the drivers that you may have thought. Much of what is being disseminated in the safety meetings is seeping out of the drivers' active memory long before the next safety meeting is conducted.

The solution is not weekly safety meetings. The solution is to reinforce the key points of the safety meeting through a variety of mediums in the weeks and months following your safety meeting. Include the key points of your safety meeting in your company newsletter, use paycheck stuffers, send a letter to your drivers' spouse, distribute cassette tapes for drivers to listen to while they drive, send QualComm messages, use your imagination and drive the message home!

Secondly, don't forget the portion of Ebbinghaus' study that revealed that "the brain retains information it considers important to the individual and forgets information deemed less relevant." When preparing for safety meetings (or any form of safety communication) give thoughtful consideration to how the information will be perceived by the drivers. The more important and relevant the information is perceived to be, the more likely the driver is to retain the information and translate it into safe behavior.

Stock, D. I-95 Corridor Coalition Field Operational Test 10: Coordinated Safety Management; Volume I: Best Practices in Motor Carrier Safety Management, Final Report, August 2001.

American Trucking Associations Foundation. *SafeReturns: A Compendium of Injury Reduction and Safety Management Practice of Award Winning Carriers*. ATAF Publication No. C0938, 1999(a).