

## **TAKE ACTION AGAINST DISTRACTION: *Staying Focused to Avoid Injury***

This easy-to-use Leader's Guide is provided to assist in conducting a successful presentation. Featured are:

**INTRODUCTION:** A brief description of the program and the subject that it addresses.

**PROGRAM OUTLINE:** Summarizes the program content. If the program outline is discussed before the video is presented, the entire program will be more meaningful and successful.

**PREPARING FOR AND CONDUCTING THE PRESENTATION:** These sections will help you set up the training environment, help you relate the program to site-specific incidents, and provide program objectives for focusing your presentation.

**REVIEW QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:** Questions may be copied and given to participants to document how well they understood the information that was presented. Answers to the review questions are provided separately.

### **INTRODUCTION**

We all are aware of the dangers of distracted driving, but there are other activities we engage in that demand our full attention to avoid accidents and injuries. Many people are hurt or killed when they become distracted while working or walking. Distraction has taken and destroyed a lot of lives and it will continue to do so, but we don't have to let this happen; we can do something about it. In this program, EMT/Firefighter/Best-Selling Author Martin Lesperance discusses various types of distractions and the actions we can take to prevent our attention from being diverted from the task at hand.

Topics include maintaining concentration, avoiding distracting other people, fixing dangerous situations, distracted walking, the four types of distracted driving, making a conscious effort to avoid distractions and avoiding fatigue.

### **PROGRAM OUTLINE**

#### **THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF DISTRACTING SOMEONE**

- A school wood shop teacher was using a band saw in class. As he was using the saw, one of the students threw a little piece of wood at him.
- It hit him in the back so he turned around to see what was going on and as he turned around, his hand brushed against the running saw blade. He grabbed his hand, he looked up, he looked at the class and said, "Ouch! My fingers are gone!"
- Three fingers were amputated. A man lost three fingers because someone distracted him by throwing a little piece of wood.
- In a perfect world, the teacher should have been 100 percent focused on the task at hand, using the saw, but because his attention was diverted away, he lost focus on using the saw. Because he lost focus on using the saw, he lost focus on his safety; and, because he lost focus on his safety, he lost his fingers.
- Obviously, the student didn't mean for this to happen, but it did happen and that was the unintended consequences of distracting someone.
- Getting hit with a small piece of wood is a different kind of distraction than we always hear about. We hear about distracted driving all the time, but there are other activities that can be just as dangerous, if a person is distracted.

#### **HOW PEOPLE GET DISTRACTED**

- How do people get distracted? Sometimes, we just let ourselves get distracted, like when we pick up the ringing phone when we're driving. No one's forcing you to take that call, but suddenly that phone call becomes the most important thing in the world, more important than your safety and the safety of others.
- Other distractions can happen when our mind just drifts away. We may be operating some machinery at work and our mind is 2,000 miles away on a beach in Mexico, when it should be focusing on operating that machine safely.

- There are so many visual and mental situations that can steal your focus away from the task at hand. This can happen almost at any time or anywhere.
- As we've seen, distractions can happen when someone else distracts you.

### **MAINTAINING CONCENTRATION**

- When a mind starts to wander, what can we do to bring it back to the task at hand? First of all, we can't think about two things at the same time. We can think about one and then the other, it does take a little time to go back and forth, but we can't think about two things at the same time.
- There are activities which at times become like second nature, like going for a walk. Most of us are accomplished walkers. We can walk and talk and think about something at the same time as long as it's on a nice, safe, flat surface.
- Now, let's say you're walking on an icy surface, or on a narrow ledge, uneven ground or anywhere else that needs your full attention, you have to be concentrating on where you're placing your feet. You have to be concentrating on your walking. You can't think about where you're placing your feet and something else at the same time.
- When you notice your thoughts are starting to drift away, you have to make a conscious effort to reel those thoughts back into the moment. Concentrate on the task at hand.
- How many times have you left the house and as you were walking to the car or you're in the car, did you think, did I lock the door? What happens is you drive back, you go back up the stairs and you check the door and sure enough it was locked. Compare that to when you lock the door to the house, you actually focus on locking the door. Now, when you drive away, you know it's locked.

### **DON'T DISTRACT OTHER PEOPLE**

- Don't distract other people. You have to be aware at times we can be distracting people, while they're doing a critical task, like backing up a car or using a tool.
- Before you approach someone, make sure it's safe to do so. Make sure you get their attention and don't surprise them.
- If you can't get their attention, wait until you do before you approach. Wait until it is safe to do so.

### **DISTRACTED WALKING**

- People are getting hurt when they're walking more than ever before and it's easy to understand why. People are walking while they're using their handheld devices.
- People step off curbs, trip on cracks in sidewalks or they walk or run into things. People walk right into traffic and they get hit by vehicles because they were looking at their phones and they were oblivious to everything around them, including their own safety.
- People have been struck by trains and vehicles while wearing headphones. The person didn't hear the car horns or the train whistle.
- Your hearing is an important sense when it comes to staying safe. Don't let yourself become distracted by loud music or any other noise when you need your full attention on the task at hand.
- It's not only driving and walking while distracted that's dangerous, but so many other tasks need your full attention.

### **FIXING DANGEROUS SITUATIONS**

- If you see a dangerous situation, fix it. Do something about it. If you can't fix it, mark it so that someone will notice that there's a hazard there and report it to someone who can take care of it.
- Whatever you do, don't just walk along, take a look at it and go "whoa, that's dangerous" and keep on going, because you never know when it's going to raise its ugly head and hurt someone.

- What can we do to prevent ourselves from becoming distracted? First of all, we have to take action against distraction because it won't happen by itself.

## **DISTRACTED DRIVING**

### ***Cognitive Distraction***

- The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration classifies distraction into four types and I think these are a great explanation, not only for distracted driving but distraction and doing any activity.
- The first one is cognitive. Your mind is elsewhere. You're lost in your thoughts. You may have gotten into a fight with your spouse at breakfast and now you're reliving the argument in your mind as you drive to work.
- Road rage: when you're that angry, you're not concentrating on your driving.
- Have you ever missed a turn when you're driving home? Maybe this is something you're done hundreds or thousands of times before, but today for some reason you completely forgot where you were and you missed your turn. This is a good example of cognitive distraction.
- Luckily, all that happened is you missed your turn and there wasn't a child crossing the intersection, because if you didn't notice your turn until it was too late, there's a good chance you wouldn't have noticed that child until it was too late.
- Distraction can cause you to look but not see. Some experts call this "inattention blindness." Inattention blindness is an event where a person fails to recognize something that's right in front of them.
- Now, this isn't a problem with the eyes, it's more like a psychological problem. Here's an example. A car pulls up to a stop sign to cross a highway. The driver looks both ways and then pulls right out in front of an oncoming vehicle. This is a good example of inattention blindness.

### ***Visual Distraction***

- The second one: visual distraction. You look away from the road. There might be an animal in the ditch, an accident scene or any other thing that's out of the ordinary.

### ***Auditory Distraction***

- The third one: auditory distraction. You might be having a conversation on the phone or there might be screeching brakes happening or you may hear a loud, unnatural noise at the worksite.

### ***Biomechanical/Manual Distraction***

- The fourth one: biomechanical or manual distraction. Your hands are busy doing something. You may be picking up the phone that fell off the seat onto the floor or you may be digging in your briefcase for some papers, but your hands are busy. Often, more than one of these distractions happen at the same time.
- Dialing your phone or texting: you're concentrating on dialing and you're using your hands and you're taking your eyes off the road.
- Eating: you're eating a sloppy burger and it falls. Now all you're thinking about is the burger. Your hands are busy and you're taking your eyes off the road.
- Reading: you're concentrating on the email or text or the book you're reading; your mind is busy, your hands are busy and you're taking your eyes off the road.
- Putting makeup on: you're looking in the mirror while you're concentrating on putting your makeup on. You're busy thinking about the makeup, your hands are busy and your eyes are off the road.
- In these examples, you're concentrating on something other than driving or the task at hand. Your hands were busy; they should have been on the steering wheel instead of doing other things.

- In most of those cases, your eyes were off the road. This adds up to a very dangerous situation, not only for you but also for some innocent people who just happen to be on the same stretch of road you're on at exactly the same time.

### ***Driving In Survival Mode All The Time***

- Remember the last time you were driving in poor conditions? Everything else was put out of your mind. The music was turned down, both hands were on the wheel, and you were focused on your driving.
- You were driving like in survival mode. When driving, why not drive in survival mode all the time? Drive like your life and the lives of others depends on it, because it does.
- The consequences can be just the same if you're involved in a motor vehicle collision in a snow storm or a nice summer day. Remember, at any time you're behind the wheel, you may have to take quick, evasive action to prevent a collision.
- Distraction slows reaction time. It's not only when you're driving your car, but being distracted when you're operating any kind of vehicle or machinery is dangerous. Even riding your bicycle or using hand tools need your focus.

### **MAKING A CONSCIOUS EFFORT TO AVOID DISTRACTIONS**

- You have to make a conscious effort to do this and if you let yourself be distracted, you'll be distracted.
- For distracted driving, it's pretty easy. You just have to choose not to be distracted. It's a conscious effort and you can do that by following these steps.
- Don't talk or text on your phone when you're driving. The best thing is to shut it off and put it out of reach. This way you won't be tempted to see who's calling you.
- There are apps that won't let any messages come through until you're stopped, but most phones have voicemail and those texts and email will still be there when you turn on your phone again.
- If a distraction pops up, like the kids start fighting or one of them throws up, pull over in a safe spot. Trying to deal with it when you're driving is not only ineffective, it's dangerous.
- Check your GPS or maps before you start the trip. Know where you're going before you leave.
- Turn down the music and take the headphones off. This way you'll be able to hear horns that are honking at you or the sirens of emergency vehicles.
- Get organized. A lot of people's vehicles are bit on the messy side. If you've got stuff piled all over, when you take a turn or you hit the brakes, stuff goes flying off all over the vehicle. Now, you're tempted to pick it up and that can be distracting.
- Don't let your pets distract you. You see a lot of people driving around with their pets sitting in their lap. What they don't realize is that this is not only distracting, but if they're in a motor vehicle collision, even from eight to 14 miles an hour, the airbag is going to deploy.
- Now just watch how fast this deploys in video. It deployed at around 200 miles per hour. Think about what that will do to your dog. It's going to slam them, break every bone in their body, break every blood vessel in their body and it's going to slam it into your chest, probably with enough force to stop your heart. Now that's a big distraction! There's no reason to have your pets on your lap while you're driving.
- Here's another one: when you notice your thoughts are starting to wander, make a conscious effort to realizing that they are wandering and reel them back in to the task at hand. You can't be 100 percent focused on everything you do all the time and you don't have to be. It depends on the consequences.

- If you're going to be watching TV in your comfy chair and your mind starts to wander and you fall asleep, well, it's no big deal. But if you're behind the wheel and your mind starts to wander and you blow through a red light, well, that's a very big deal.

### **AVOIDING FATIGUE**

- If you're tired, that can make it much easier for you to be distracted if you're driving your vehicle or doing any other task. Fatigue can make your mind more prone to become distracted. It slows reaction time. It increases forgetfulness and decreases attention span.
- It can cause microsleeps. Microsleeps are those couple second naps that you've had behind the wheel and probably a lot of you watching this have had them. You're driving along and suddenly you wake up with a start and you realize you've actually been sleeping.
- Now, if you've had a microsleep and you're watching this, you're lucky because for a lot of people, their first microsleep is their last, because they fell asleep long enough to drift over into an oncoming semi trailer or they drifted off to the right and they hit a rock or a tree or they rolled their vehicle.
- Make sure you get enough proper sleep. That's one of those things that's easier said than done, but you want to make it a priority.
- Shift work complicates it, makes it harder to get the proper sleep but you have to do your best to get the proper sleep. Your safety and the safety of others will depend on it. Not only that, it's going to improve your quality of life.

### **CONCLUSION**

- Distraction has taken and destroyed a lot of lives and it will continue to do so, but we don't have to let this happen. We can do something about it.
- One of the best definitions of mindfulness, which means you're concentrating on the moment: how many have you have heard: wherever you are, be there?

## **PREPARE FOR THE SAFETY MEETING**

Review each section of this Leader's Guide as well as the program. Here are a few suggestions for using the program:

Make everyone aware of the importance the company places on health and safety and how each person must be an active member of the safety team.

Introduce the program. Play it without interruption. Review the program content by presenting the information in the program outline.

Copy the review questions included in this Leader's Guide and ask each participant to complete them.

Make an attendance record and have each participant sign the form. Maintain the attendance record and each participant's test paper as written documentation of the training performed.

Here are some suggestions for preparing your video equipment and the room or area you use:

Check the room or area for quietness, adequate ventilation and temperature, lighting and unobstructed access.

Check the seating arrangement and the audiovisual equipment to ensure that all participants will be able to see and hear the program.

## **CONDUCTING THE PRESENTATION**

Begin the meeting by welcoming the participants. Introduce yourself and give each person the opportunity to become acquainted if there are new people joining the training session.

Explain that the primary purpose of the program is to discuss various types of distractions and the actions we can take to prevent our attention from being diverted from the task at hand.

Introduce the program. Play it without interruption. Review the program content by presenting the information in the program outline.

Lead discussions about job tasks at your facility that could be dangerous if a worker were to become distracted and the steps that can be taken to avoid distractions while performing those tasks.

After watching the program, viewers should be able to explain the following:

- Why it is important to always maintain concentration on the task at hand;
- Why we should be careful not to distract other people;
- How distractions cause injuries while we're walking;
- What the four types of driving distractions are;
- What actions to take when making a conscious effort to avoid distractions;
- How to avoid fatigue.

**TAKE ACTION AGAINST DISTRACTION:**  
*Staying Focused to Avoid Injury*  
**REVIEW QUIZ**

*The following questions are provided to determine how well you understand the information presented in this program.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. The teacher whose hand brushed against the band saw blade lost \_\_\_\_\_ fingers.
  - a. Two
  - b. Three
  - c. Four
  
2. Most people can think about two things at the same time.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
3. When you notice your thoughts are starting to drift away, you have to make a conscious effort to reel those thoughts back into the moment.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
4. If you can't fix a dangerous situation, you should mark the hazard and report it to someone who can take care of it.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
5. Your hearing is NOT an important sense when it comes to staying safe.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
6. Road rage is an example of \_\_\_\_\_ distraction.
  - a. Cognitive
  - b. Visual
  - c. Auditory
  
7. \_\_\_\_\_ is an event where a person fails to recognize something that's right in front of them.
  - a. Unintentional blindness
  - b. Situational blindness
  - c. Inattentive blindness
  
8. You should only drive in survival mode when traveling in poor conditions such as a snow storm.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
9. What should you do if you are driving and a distraction such as the kids fighting pops up?
  - a. Try to deal with it while driving
  - b. Ignore it until it stops
  - c. Pull over in a safe spot to deal with it
  
10. You can't be 100 percent focused on everything you do all the time.
  - a. True
  - b. False

*ANSWERS TO THE REVIEW QUESTIONS*

1. b
2. b
3. a
4. a
5. b
6. a
7. c
8. b
9. c
10. a