

## ORCHESTRATING DELIBERATE PLAY to Improve Safety Performance & Culture

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As our high school senior was finishing her eighth year of performing in her school orchestra, we were invited to attend what would be her final competition. One test of musical literacy is called sight-reading, where the orchestra is judged on its ability to successfully play a piece that it has never seen or practiced before.

The instructor was given less than 10 minutes to teach the different sections their individual roles in the piece. After a few minutes of teaching, the instructor creatively and humorously skipped around the piece, asking the group to play the unfamiliar composition while providing feedback throughout. When time was up, the judges came in and, to their unexpected delight, the orchestra played the piece perfectly.

This experience is a great example of the impact of deliberate play, an intentional and focused effort to achieve specific outcomes such as skill development, problem-solving ability and collaboration. Engaging in purposeful, structured and enjoyable activities designed to enhance skills, knowledge, creativity and teamwork while combining elements of fun, challenge and learning helps promote personal and professional growth in individuals and groups.

The concept is rooted in positive psychology and organizational development. It draws inspiration from the idea that individuals learn best when they are actively engaged and motivated and enjoy the learning process. Deliberate play aims to make the learning experience more enjoyable, impactful and effective by incorporating fun, creative, playful and challenging elements into training, learning and development activities. Why not use this concept to elevate safety programs, empower teams, and orchestrate performance and culture efforts with the finesse of a master conductor? Let's explore the benefits.

### The Value of Deliberate Play

Integrating deliberate play into workplace safety training offers a dynamic approach to engaging employees, enhancing their skills and fostering a culture of safety excellence.

•**Engages and motivates employees.** Deliberate play can help to engage employees and motivate them to participate in safety training and activities. By making safety training fun and interactive, employees are more likely to pay

attention, retain information and apply what they learn to their daily work.

#### •Improves skills and knowledge.

Deliberate play can also help improve employees' safety skills and knowledge. Providing opportunities for hands-on practice, problem-solving and teamwork in a playful environment helps to enhance employees' safety competencies and confidence.

#### •Builds a culture of safety excellence.

Deliberate play can contribute to fostering a culture of safety excellence within organizations. By creating a culture where safety is seen as a priority and a shared value and responsibility, organizations can improve communication, collaboration and trust among employees.

### Tactics to Leverage Deliberate Play

Embracing a playful approach to improving safety can make learning more enjoyable, increase retention of safety information and, ultimately, create a safer and more productive workplace. Following are some tactics that organizations can deploy to leverage deliberate play to improve safety performance and culture.

•**Gamification.** Implementing safety quizzes, competitions and challenges can make safety training more engaging and interactive. Incorporating elements of competition, rewards and recognition motivates employees to participate and learn in a playful way.

•**Safety-themed games and apps.** Developing safety-themed games or mobile apps that simulate real-life safety scenarios or provide safety tips and challenges can be a fun and effective way to engage employees in safety learning. They are easily accessible to employees and can be used as supplementary tools to reinforce safety messages.

•**Simulations and drills.** Conducting safety drills, simulations and role-playing exercises can provide employees with hands-on practice in a safe environment. Creating opportunities for employees to experience real-life safety scenarios and practice their responses helps improve their skills, decision-making and confidence.

•**Team-building activities.** Organizing safety-focused team-building activities can help to foster collaboration, communication and trust among employees. Working together toward common safety goals in a fun and supportive setting, employees can build strong relationships and a sense of camaraderie, which is vital for strong cultures.

•**Creative communication channels.** Using communication channels such as videos, infographics, and storytelling can make safety messages more engaging and memorable. By incorporating humor, storytelling and visual elements, organizations can effectively communicate safety information and reinforce desired safety behaviors.

## APPLYING DELIBERATE PLAY TO SAFETY

•**Gamify safety training.** Use quizzes, competitions and rewards to make learning interactive and engaging.

•**Use simulations and role-playing.** Provide hands-on practice with real-life safety scenarios to improve decision-making and confidence.

•**Encourage storytelling.** Use real-life safety stories and role-playing exercises to create emotional connections to safety concepts.

•**Leverage creative communication.** Utilize videos, infographics and humor to make safety messages more memorable.

•**Foster teamwork through activities.** Organize safety-focused team-building exercises to strengthen collaboration and trust.

•**Empower employee involvement.** Give employees a voice in safety initiatives to build accountability and commitment.

**•Safety storytelling and role-playing.**

Incorporating storytelling and role-playing activities into safety training can help employees connect emotionally with safety concepts and understand the importance of following safety procedures. These exercises can create a more impactful learning experience.

**•Employee involvement and empowerment.** Encouraging employees to actively participate in safety initiatives, share their ideas and take ownership of safety goals can help to create a culture of accountability and empowerment. Involving employees in safety decision-making processes and giving them a voice helps employers foster a culture in which safety is everyone’s responsibility.

**•Safety challenges and puzzles.** Creating safety-related challenges, puzzles or scavenger hunts can make learning about safety more interactive and engaging. Employees can work individually or in teams to solve safety-related puzzles, which helps to reinforce key safety concepts and encourage critical thinking.

**•Interactive workshops and training sessions.** Conducting interactive workshops and training sessions that involve hands-on activities, group discussions and problem-solving exercises can improve employee learning and retention of safety information. With more dynamic and engaging safety training sessions, employees are more likely to apply what they have learned in their day-to-day work.

**•Safety team projects and initiatives.** Encouraging employees to work together on safety-focused projects or initiatives promotes teamwork, collaboration and a shared commitment to safety. Assigning safety-related tasks or projects to teams gives employees an opportunity to apply their skills and creativity to improve safety performance and culture.

Organizations can create a dynamic and engaging safety culture that prioritizes continuous learning, collaboration and innovation by implementing these tactics and exploring new ways to incorporate deliberate play into safety programs. Embracing a playful approach to improving safety can not only improve safety performance but also enhance employee morale, motivation and overall well-being in the workplace.

**Orchestrating a Symphony of Initiatives**

As the orchestra masterfully concluded their spirited performance under the instructor’s skillful guidance, the once



unfamiliar sight-reading piece came alive with precision and harmony. An intentional and focused effort yielding exceptional results, it was a triumphant testament to the power of deliberate play.

In much the same way, embracing deliberate play in the context of safety performance and culture is akin to orchestrating a symphony of initiatives that harmonize development, innovation and collaboration. Just as the orchestra adeptly performed the sight-reading piece by leveraging intentional practice and feedback, organizations can cultivate a culture of safety excellence that thrives through purposeful, structured and enjoyable activities. The artful practice of deliberate play enriches learning experiences and fuels growth and success, resonating as a powerful force for positive change.

**Conclusion**

By cultivating an intentional and enjoyable learning environment, organizations can empower employees to embrace safety with enthusiasm and dedication, elevating workplace morale, performance and well-being. Embracing deliberate play as a fundamental tenet of safety culture is more than just a compelling concept, it is the crescendo that heralds a harmonious symphony of safety excellence and success. **PSJ**

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