

# The Training Trap: When is Driver Training the Right Solution?

## Risk Control from Liberty Mutual Insurance



Your boss points out that vehicle crashes are having a serious negative impact on the bottom line and somebody (YOU) better do something about it.

Unfortunately, in many organizations whose vehicle operations don't fall under regulatory requirements, the first step many well-meaning managers take is to implement a driver training program.

### When Is Driver Training an Effective and Appropriate Intervention?

Training drivers is rarely the single solution to a vehicle crash problem. Crash statistics show that more than 90 percent of all crashes occur when someone makes a bad decision — and bad decisions are usually caused by two specific situations:

1. Lack of skill, not knowing how.
2. Knowing how to drive safely but failing or refusing to do so.

Implementing an effective, well thought out training program designed to improve, then validate and reward the skills of employees who drive on company business, is definitely an appropriate intervention. However, training is not likely to make up for selecting drivers with a history of motor vehicle violations, compensation systems that reward aggressive driving, or scheduling that requires aggressive driving to complete tasks on schedule.

Most safety professionals agree that implementing training programs for drivers who already have the skills to drive safely but refuse to do so will rarely impact crash occurrence. In these cases, the organization is probably facing a more serious situation: they have a management problem, not driver performance problem.

### How do you know if Driver Training is an Appropriate Intervention?

There are several ways to determine if a driver training program is a good solution. Unfortunately, many companies jump on the training bandwagon too soon and subsequently wonder why nothing changes.

There are several indicators that driver training may be effective as part of an overall solution.

- Crash analysis. Evaluate the crashes that are occurring in the organization. Does the data indicate that drivers have skill deficiencies or lack the knowledge to prevent similar crashes from occurring in the future?
- Post-crash investigations. Similar to crash analysis, this step involves a study of individual crashes and their causes. (Something that every company should be doing!) Are the causes of these crashes the kind of issues that driver training will solve?
- Drivers making bad decisions based upon observation. Are drivers observed making risky decisions while driving? Are their decisions based upon lack of understanding of the consequences? If so, training may be necessary.
- Have new equipment or new routes been added to the operation? Training may be necessary to familiarize drivers with different handling characteristics of new equipment or with new and unique exposures of a new route.

If driver training is, indeed, an appropriate intervention, using the answers to the questions above to design the driver-training program will greatly improve the opportunity for success.

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## Indicators That Training Will Work

Virtually all businesses do some form of employee training. However, training is often seen as “the solution” to all problems. Training by itself is rarely the only solution to any problem. Organizations that are successful in the training they provide their employees usually have similar characteristics:

- They expect their employees to continuously improve and they expect professional development.
- They educate employees in other areas of the business on a regular basis.
- They train employees beyond what is required by regulations.
- They provide employees with the right tools (including vehicles) and procedures to do their work safely.
- They have an effective performance management program.
- The managers always ask their employees, “What did you learn during that training class, how will you apply it, and how will I measure your new knowledge?”
- Training is the effective communication of expectations and not just safety theory.

## Indicators That Training Won't Work

First, answer the questions above. If the answers are “no” to most of them, the odds are that implementing a driver (or any) training program will be unsuccessful. Additionally, there are several other telltale indicators that training will fail.

- When managers won't measure training effectiveness. Deciding to “do training” is a fairly easy decision. But identifying ways to measure its effectiveness, and subsequently use those measures to determine how effective the training was is not nearly so easy. Managers who are unwilling to spend the time necessary to measure the program's effectiveness are probably not willing to ensure that it has been meaningful.
- When managers won't participate. A telltale sign that a training program won't work is when managers, particularly senior managers, determine that the program is not worth their time. One of the most effective Decision Driving® programs ever initiated by a Liberty Mutual customer was kicked off by the CEO of the company — a very large public utility. And subsequently, the CEO sat through the program so he would know what to expect from his management team.
- When nothing changes afterwards. This speaks for itself. If, after all the time and expense to deliver a driver training program nothing changes, you know the program has failed.
- When management has not developed and effectively communicated expectations for driver performance and compared the performance to the expectations.

## Measuring Driver Training Effectiveness

Many managers measure training effectiveness by comparing the number and cost of crashes after training to what they were before training. While that may, indeed, be a useful and important measure, there are other variables that can cause problems if this is the only measure used.

Using the cost of loss measures “downstream” results. It does not attempt to measure the actual causes of crashes. Consider the following situations.

Drivers A, B, and C attend a driver training program where proper following distance is emphasized. Subsequently, they return to their operation.

- Driver A fails to maintain adequate following distance and hits the vehicle in front of him because he cannot stop in time. Injuries are serious and the cost of the crash is very high.

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- Driver B fails to maintain adequate following distance and slams on his brakes too late, but because the driver ahead of him moves forward slightly when he sees Driver B coming, no crash occurs.
  - Driver C maintains proper following distance and by braking hard, has plenty of time to stop suddenly when the vehicle in front of him fails to signal a turn.

Their manager records Driver A's crash, adds it to her spreadsheet and has a difficult discussion with Driver A. Because she is only measuring crash occurrence, she does not even know about Driver B's failure to maintain proper following distance. Both drivers committed the same serious driving error, only one had a serious crash, the other did not.

Driver C did a good job but the manager will never know that he used the training he received. Measuring crash occurrence only, does not tell the whole picture.

Crashes don't really occur that often, and waiting for them to happen in order to measure the effectiveness of a training program is not good practice!

### Upstream Measures of Driver Training Effectiveness

Many progressive companies are starting to measure "upstream" activities: indicators and behaviors that reveal whether or not drivers are actually applying their training. They recognize that crashes, and worker accidents for that matter, are caused by a succession of events. Measuring and tracking those events offers a more "real time" understanding of whether training is being used. Some of those measures include:

- **Fuel mileage:** Skilled and safe drivers get better mileage when compared to fleet average.
- **Maintenance costs:** Skilled and safe drivers have lower repair costs and lower replacement rates for tires and brakes compared to fleet average.
- **Hard braking episodes:** Telematics systems can identify and record hard braking events and are an indication of aggressive driving.
- **Speeding:** Technology can measure the frequency of speeding events compared to an established benchmark. Speed can be measured compared to the posted speed limit using telematics.
- **Percent seat belt use:** Include the expectation of seat belt usage in driver training, and simply by observation, measure percent compliance in the fleet. Some telematics systems can measure seat belt usage.
- **Percent drivers with clear MVR for 3 years:** Measure this percentage as a way to measure management effectiveness in administering an effective vehicle safety program.

### A Good Driver Training Program

Effective driver training programs are *not* all classroom! In Liberty Mutual's annual survey of large trucking companies, those with better-than-average results provide in-vehicle training as well as classroom.

Senior management supports effective training programs. They introduce the program, and managers, at all levels, participate in the training to lead by example.

Trained trainers, who want to be involved and are rewarded for their effort, deliver the program, and a portion of their performance is determined by how effectively they deliver training.

Trainees want to be involved. They know they will be recognized and rewarded for improving their skills, and they know they will be expected to apply their new knowledge on the highway.

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The program is not “canned.” It is tailored to the needs of the organization and to the types of crashes occurring. Training should be the communication of expectations and not just theory. For example telling workers 4 seconds of following distance is the safe distance for passenger vehicles is a safety concept or theory. Telling drivers they are expected to maintain 4 seconds of following distance while operating motor vehicles on company business is the communication of an expectation.

Finally, the organization itself knows that training will not solve every problem.

### **Additional Resources**

For additional resources on this subject, please see the following Liberty Mutual Insurance Risk Control reference notes.

*Driver feedback systems and in-cab technology*, RC 5336

*Technology in the transportation industry*, RC 5275

*Measuring fleet safety program effectiveness*, RC 5337

*Managing vital driving performance™*, RC 1026

*Managing vital driving performance™* root cause analysis, RC 5392

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