

Getting the EDGE

By Jason Myers

As managers, we are always trying to find the latest management methods and secrets of the rich and powerful. But so often, we forget to review the tried and true methods that have been used for decades, even centuries. While developing this article, I was also planning a Boy Scout Summer Camp and a company safety meeting when I realized the similarities in the training, preparation, and activities for each of these events. One of the major training methods that scouting has been using since its start in 1910 is the EDGE method. It provides an easy-to-remember and highly effective way to teach any group, whether it is a group of scouts on an outdoor adventure or a group of construction laborers who are learning about the latest OSHA silica regulations. The EDGE method provides a four-step process of Explaining, Demonstrating, Guiding, and Enabling.

Each of these steps are part of our normal job activities but especially while teaching. I believe one thing we all do is focus on the early steps of the list and spend less time on the later steps, or even skip the later steps altogether. However, the power of the EDGE method is in the later steps. In today's litigious society, with increasingly complex issues, the later steps become essential. For example, if you are dealing with an OSHA inspection, they will not just ask if your crew has been educated about a certain topic but will look for demonstrated proof. With the EDGE method, you will have proof that they have been educated in the topic, have demonstrated the knowledge, and positively establish their knowledge basis.

EXPLAINING HOW IT IS DONE

This is the part of the training process that we spend the most time on and that takes the most effort. This includes time figuring out the information that needs to be presented, coming up with ways to explain that information in a clear and concise manner, and then getting the communication aids together (PowerPoint presentations, handouts, samples, etc.). There is a tremendous amount of time spent on this necessary activity, so it is important to clearly identify the critical training items up front so time is not wasted on nonessentials.

DEMONSTRATING THE STEPS

At one of the Boy Scout meetings, we had a training time where several of the older scouts taught the younger scouts how to tie knots. During the training, the older scouts used the Scout Handbook to show the proper steps but did not

demonstrate themselves with actual rope, while the younger scouts did practice with actual ropes. After the training session, we had a relay race with various teams tying the knots they had just learned at each of the stations. To the embarrassment of the older scouts, they were soundly defeated by the younger scouts in the relay. There was even one older scout that had to confess that he did not know how to tie one of the knots he had just taught. This proves that just because you have the "book knowledge," it does not always mean that you have the head wisdom or hands-on knowledge. After training, it is important to have some way to physically demonstrate the knowledge or to be able to explain it in a different scenario, whether this is putting on a respirator after a respirator training class or tying knots in a fall protection class. Everyone learns in different ways and this provides a time for visual learners to see how something is done. The demonstration process can be used very effectively to enhance the explaining process, and often resulting in less overall time to reach a given level of knowledge.

GUIDING THE LEARNERS TO PRACTICE

I have been snow camping with Boy Scouts for the past 2 years at the base of Mt. Lassen in Northern California. Each year, the troop had a goal to build an igloo to sleep in (still waiting for our first success). Each year, the scouts have had the training to build the igloo and have demonstrated the steps before going out to try and do it, but not until you are actually building it—to practically demonstrate your knowledge—do you really find out if you know what you thought you knew. When you are faced with over 10 ft (3 m) of snow, temperatures that you can count on your fingers, and you desperately need to build a shelter, you find out if the knowledge you learned will save you.

So often when training is done, we perform the steps that need to occur and we can show how it is done, but not until the students demonstrate that knowledge do we find out if they fully understand it. This can be done in several different ways. One of them is by testing their knowledge through a written test. The advantage of a written test is it provides a document demonstrating their knowledge and the test can be tailor-made for the topic.

There are a couple safety items that my company must train our crews for with the local power company. For these training items, I have created specific questions of how shotcrete works within their safety program. Rather than the typical general questions that deal with issues my crew will never see, I am focusing on actual situations and

applications that they will deal with. Another way to facilitate practical retention is having them demonstrate it. A person understands so much more of how to do an action when they can do it in a safe environment. Whether this includes repelling off a building after a fall protection class or putting out an actual fire with a fire extinguisher, it is essential to demonstrate what you have learned.

While this step is often shortened or overlooked, I believe it is the most important step. In today's litigious mindset and document-crazy society, it is no longer safe to just issue a training card to an employee after they have been trained. All of us have been questioned about what topics have been covered and how do we know that the trainee understands the knowledge that has been given to them. By testing or having them demonstrate the training, it provides an additional essential step to make sure that there is full comprehension of the knowledge given. Today's construction workforce is multilingual with many of our workers not having English as a primary language. Thus, some form of testing or demonstration is essential to know the issues being presented are getting past the language barrier.

ENABLING THEM TO SUCCEED

Through training, demonstrating, and guiding, the final critical step is enabling them to succeed. By performing all the previous steps, the trainees have been exposed to the knowledge, observed the knowledge in action, and shown they understand the knowledge. We often joke around in scouting that there is never a successful activity unless there is some sort of badge awarded at the end of the event. In a way, this is true for all trainees. Part of enabling them to succeed is the documentation that acknowledges they have been trained. By providing proof of training, it further motivates them to perform the tasks required.

One of my Assistant Scoutmasters works for a major pharmaceutical company in the Bay Area of California and was placed in charge of a division of the company that was not doing well and being considered for shut down. He decided to employ the EDGE method with his team by:

- Explaining—educating the team on how things are done with the correct procedures and documentation;
- Demonstrating—setting exact standards and expectations of how the operations are to be performed;
- Guiding—having them demonstrate that they understand the required procedures and processes; and
- Enabling—allowing the team to perform only according to the specified standards and procedures.

As a result, the division made a major turn around

THE EDGE METHOD

1. EXPLAINING

2. DEMONSTRATING

3. GUIDING

4. ENABLING

and instead of having to micromanage his team, he has stepped back. His team members now perform the work more efficiently and to a higher standard with fewer errors, because the expectations, standards, and procedures have been standardized.

The EDGE method is a highly effective and adaptive management training tool. It has been well proven over time and in many different circumstances—from life and death situations to teaching the latest techniques and methods. The EDGE method is a salute to past successes for training workers and leaders of the future. So often we focus on the latest idea or the newest book when we should also be examining what has worked in the past and proven with time. The EDGE method exemplifies the old verse, “there is nothing new under the sun.”



Jason Myers graduated from California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo, CA, in 1995 with his Bachelor's in civil engineering and from Golden Gate University, San Francisco, CA, in 2015 with his Master's in business administration with an emphasis in project management. Myers started out his professional career working

for an earth retention subcontractor, where he learned the importance of budgeting, scheduling, and client relationships. Also, during this time, he was introduced to the use of shotcrete and its applications. After working for a general contractor for a couple of years, he realized that he enjoyed the tighter knit of working for a subcontractor and the ability to construct projects on a tighter time frame with several going at once. Myers also enjoys the process of handling most of the procedures that go into constructing a project rather than seeing only a small portion of the process. Myers joined Dees Hennessey in 2004 and has been a part owner of the company since 2007. He currently serves as the Vice President of Operations as well as the Safety Director.