

# HUDDLE UP

Building tailgate talks with purpose and thought adds training value



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**T**ailgate talks. Admit it; the second you read those two words, your mind went to thoughts like, “Oh my, I need to figure out what to talk about or type up for this week’s talk.” Or “BORING!” Of course. That’s how I normally observe tailgate talks being perceived and prioritized at almost every company I work with.

The standard of policy for an effective tailgate talk program includes 1) a pre-developed 52-week curriculum, 2) pre-developed content for you and your trainers to deliver, and 3) designated trainers (teachers/coaches) who have been trained to deliver the training. (This last category is also referred to as a “train the trainer” method of teaching.)

## The recipe

The recipe for a meaningful and valuable tailgate training program requires that you prioritize these three primary objectives (ingredients): Outcome(s), Curriculum, and Content (including Verification).

## Outcome(s)

Before you think about delivering any kind of training, first you need to clearly define the expected outcomes. Adult learners need to know the purpose and the expected outcome of any training you deliver.

For example: “Curb to curb” snow plowing and shoveling is a common standard I hear in the industry. To meet this standard, we first need to clearly define what it means, what it should look like and what methods are required to meet this standard of care. Too often I find people try to

maintain this standard more often than is required during a storm rather than post-storm as a final cleanup operation. This creates a reduced productivity and profitability challenge.

## Curriculum

Develop a list of topics that deserve consistent attention and make it a priority for these to be trained, reinforced and trained some more. This typically includes standard operating procedures, quality and productivity. Notice that I didn’t include safety, which is usually what tailgate talks are primarily geared toward.

Rather than think about safety



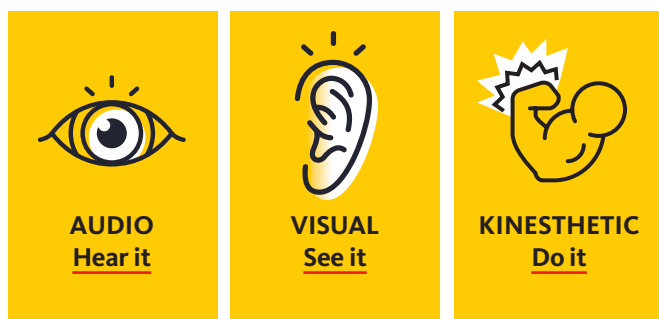
**CURRICULUM POINTS:** When developing tailgate talk training, every training should include safety, purpose, methods and techniques like RM Landscape (a WIT Collaborative Company) does in its “Daily Huddle.”

as its own topic, it should be an embedded priority that is taught in every training topic, whether it’s anti-icing practices, plowing, sidewalk operations or deicing methods.

Your cadence of curriculum should include four embedded topics: Safety, purpose, methods and techniques (see above).

## Content

When you think about your target student or audience, consider how people learn (i.e., hearing, seeing and doing) and what motivates them to learn. Whatever training you develop



and deliver, incorporate all three methods of learning.

**The 2-3-5 rule.** When you develop any kind of training, try to keep each topic to 10 minutes or less, as a guide. I recommend:

- 2 minutes to read instructions or ideas (auditory)
- 3 minutes to show someone how to do it (visual)
- 5 minutes to let someone do it (kinesthetic)

Develop and deliver your training in a manner that consistently connects these three ways that people learn; this will enable the training to be a) connectable, b) relatable, c) retained and, most importantly, d) practiced (implemented).

If necessary, repeat the training. My teaching experience has showed me that almost no one retains 100% of the information on the first try. There will be topics that may require more time. I recommend 20 minutes maximum will work within most people's attention spans.

**Learning motivation.** Purpose + Passion = Motivation. It's our job as the teachers and coaches to clearly identify the purpose of each training and tailor it to the learner's passion (or sometimes lack of passion) for the topic. While the topic may inspire you, think about teaching those who would rather not be there. What are the simple rules to follow that will help keep a majority of your team motivated to learn?

① Follow the K.I.S.S. (Keep It Simple Silly) concept to earn people's attention. Start with the reason(s) the training is important to understand, retain and implement.

② Practice brevity to keep people's attention. Keep it short and to the point. If possible, keep everyone standing to help people engage with their teammates and maintain high energy. Sitting causes us to get comfortable and pay less attention.

③ Answer the question: What's in it for them? Does what you are teaching help them be safer, more promotable, more efficient (more free time) and more profitable (earn more \$).

**Verification.** Provide team members with an opportunity to verify that the training is understood by letting them "do it," a form of kinesthetic learning. Provide tools to do the job and allow team members to share in the experience.

As you build your program, consider how you will assess that they retained what was taught, verify they are implementing what was taught, and check to be sure they are meeting the standard level of expectations you defined in the training. The best way to verify if what's being taught is retained is by asking someone to repeat the process back

to you. Do this promptly (the same or next day), privately (so as not to embarrass the individual) and progressively (to reinforce and build upon the training).

In any learning environment, there will always be imperfection and opportunities to improve. Getting started and staying on task for 10 minutes a week at a minimum is a great start. Then think about how much more everyone will learn if you can work toward training 5-10 minutes a day. That would eventually equal at least 1,000 minutes, or over 16 hours, of training per person per year. **SB**

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