

**POST-CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS  
WORKSHOP SESSION SUMMARY  
NIEHS NATIONAL TRAINERS' EXCHANGE  
MARCH 2012**

**1. Session Title and Presenter's Contact Information:**

"Engaging Young Workers in Health and Safety Training"

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**2. Workshop Summary**

With an aging worker population, current worker training programs need to engage younger workers to carry on the movement of protecting worker health and safety. Participants of this workshop discussed the need and strategies to engage younger workers in all aspects of our training programs.

The workshop included an exercise for participants to think about what divides the populations they train and how those divisions and unique characteristics need to be considered during the training. There was a presentation of results from the United Steelworkers (USW) Next Generation focus group on involving young USW activists in health and safety activities and training. Participants also had small group discussions and reported back on topics and experiences related to training young workers, what gets young workers involved, and what keeps them from getting involved.

**3. Methods**

There were several training methods used in this workshop. During the first exercise, participants were asked to move around the room based upon the facilitator's designation of areas of the room for certain personal characteristics. This was effective because participants were able to move around and actively participate. However, discussion was difficult because the room was so large.

Small group discussions were also utilized. Each table discussed a topic or question provided by the facilitator. A scribe for each table recorded the ideas and reported back to the whole group on table's discussion. All those in attendance were able to participate and learn from the experience of others in the room.

Finally, lecture with a powerpoint presentation was used to report on the results of the focus group. This was limited to a short presentation in order to hold a brief discussion of the entire room at the end of the workshop. This was done to ensure that the take-home points were spelled out for the participants.

#### **4. Main Points**

##### **Key lessons**

- We need to understand our training populations - who they are, what social groupings they are part of and what are the particular social factors that affect them – in order to ensure that we are communicating in a way that they will understand.
- We also need to consider underrepresented groups in our training populations, how they might view the room, and how that will affect the way they communicate.
- Young workers believe health and safety training is important and want the opportunity to participate with more experienced mentors or at new employee orientation.
- Some reasons that young workers don't get involved include the following: low seniority; fear of speaking up; don't see other young people as activists; don't know their rights; and don't understand the history.
- Some reasons young workers get involved include the following: health and safety training is interesting, and not just technical; they are given the opportunity to attend trainings or meetings; they are involved in a health and safety accident or incident; and when an experienced worker mentors them.

##### **Responses from the participants**

- We need to think about the internal culture of our organizations and how we relate to young or new workers. In one organization young workers are told to "sit down and don't talk" rather than having folks attempt to engage them.
- Some training methods, like the Small Group Activity Method, can work for any audience as long as you tailor it to draw out that group's knowledge and experiences.
- This is a critical issue for all workplaces and worker-training organizations because we cannot expect them to prosper and continue

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without training knowledgeable younger workers to take over once current activists retire.

**5. References**

**6. Workshop Handouts/ Resources**

Powerpoint presentation: Involving Young Workers