

# Behavioural Safety

By Tess Allen

## Forum Interactive

Forum Interactive is a learning and development consultancy which specialises in influencing the way people think and behave at work. Our drama, active and experiential learning methods are highly effective in addressing the human factors associated with creating a safety culture.

Over the last three years our collaboration with First Group (in both UK and North America) has led to significant reductions in key target areas:

*“Drama-based learning has had a significant effect on First Group’s safety record. Since January 2007 we have had a 47% reduction in time lost through injury and a 30% drop in collision and red signal mistakes. Further, our database shows over 500,000 injury prevention contacts have been made between employees and managers.”*

(Naveed Qamar, Group Safety Director, First Group)

## Health and Safety: the challenge

The challenge for organisations is how to embed a sustainable culture of safety. It may be the case that staff:

- do not see safety as their responsibility
- do not feel empowered to challenge unsafe practices
- are task focussed and under time pressures
- operate in an environment of blame.

The organisation needs to move to a point where:

- health and safety is a key organisational value
- the operation of safety systems values quality rather than quantity
- all staff take personal responsibility for safety and have developed ‘the safety habit’.

**forum interactive**

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## Forum Interactive - Behavioural Safety

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### How do we help you?

We engage staff in health and safety by using human stories. The stories are based on evidence from research and incident reports and told through plays, interactive theatre and film.

We use them to:

- raise awareness, develop motivation and commitment to action
- explore values, attitudes and behaviours that underpin a positive safety culture
- develop management and leadership skills that underpin a positive safety culture.

### Safe as Houses

*Safe as Houses* (written by Tess Allen and Graham Sharrock) is one example of the methods we use. It is a play based on the Final Investigation Report into the BP Texas City Disaster 2005 and communicates the root and contributory causes of the accident.

We usually perform this play in separate scenes as a central stimulus for discussion and learning about why accidents and injuries happen and how this relates to the operation of systems and processes.

*Safe as Houses* was used recently by Translink at a conference with senior managers. Granville Levin, Health & Safety Manager commented:

*"You've taken a huge technical document and turned it into something that anyone can understand... You've created BP out of a kettle and an empty space!"*

**You can see *Safe as Houses* at the IOSH Spotlight Theatre on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> March at 4pm (ends 4.30pm).**

### Contact Us

You can find us at stand F43 in Hall 5.

Here you can pick up a DVD case study and demo DVD of "Handling Aggressive Situations (for Lone Workers)."

### forum interactive

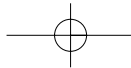
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CASE STUDY

PASSENGER TRANSPORT



AUTHOR  
Tess Allen

First Group and Forum Interactives' aim is to use drama and experiential learning as a way to shift attitudes fundamentally towards health and safety among staff, as well as to improve leadership skills among managers



— FOCUS DECEMBER 2009

# The play's the thing

## Using drama to deliver the health and safety message

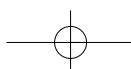
■ Drama shift attitudes. Tess Allen, Director, Forum Interactive, reveals how First Group has discovered that, when looking at ways to reduce accidents, the plays the thing.

With mounting pressure from the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) and central government to reduce workplace accidents within the public transport sector, health and safety managers are looking for more effective ways to get the message home.

Despite all the resources available, it remains a daunting challenge to persuade any workforce to take health and safety seriously, or engage them in a meaningful way. However, there are new methodologies

emerging within the sector that are pointing the way to a brighter future.

First Group has been working with international learning and development consultancy Forum Interactive to introduce drama-based learning to its subsidiary businesses. The aim is to use drama and experiential learning as a way to shift attitudes fundamentally towards health and safety among staff, as well as to improve leadership skills among managers.



Over the past three years, First Group and Forum Interactive have been delivering a series of workshops, road shows and events across many subsidiaries, including Scotrail, First Group America (Laidlaw and Greyhound), First Manchester and First Great Western. Through these events, drama-based learning has been used to trigger an emotional engagement with the health and safety message, to create impact and to encourage staff to see health and safety as a personal concern. For First Group, it has also been a way of winning hearts and minds, and creating a realistic, believable and engaging learning environment for its staff.

Senior and middle managers have also been exploring and engaging with new transformational leadership skills to help them direct health and safety initiatives more effectively, as well as continue to reinforce the process of attitudinal change among staff.

**So how does drama work?**

Traditional health and safety training methods have often relied too much on delivering the big message through an instructive format, be it a lecture, conference or instruction handbook. In these scenarios, staff and managers are expected to listen and absorb health and safety messages, and then seamlessly apply them to their working lives. Unfortunately, what is taught today is often forgotten tomorrow, particularly when people have hectic schedules to keep. Being taught in this way certainly does highlight health and safety over the short term, but does little to effect long-term change.

Drama-based learning is about learning by doing rather than instruction. It is about learning by seeing, experiencing and interacting, and this can generate a strong emotional response. Through emotion, health and safety managers are able to engage their audience and begin to shift attitudes.

**First Group case studies**

Below are just a few examples of the many drama-based projects that First Group has initiated since 2006, with a look at how the theory is applied in a practical context, the methodologies used, and the benefits and outcomes.

**Changing staff attitudes: 'Jim's Story'**

In 2006, drama was used for the first time at First Group's annual safety conference at Warwick involving senior managers and executives from the group's companies around the world. The idea was to engage the group's rail and bus operators, and fundamentally change their attitudes to health and safety. The key message was simple: that each and every staff member is personally responsible for health and safety, and that ultimately it is the individual's actions that count.

Forum Interactive created and performed a 20-minute play for the conference called *Jim's Story*. The play explored the aftermath of a fatal road traffic accident, where a young child is hit by a bus at a school crossing. The play focused on the shocking emotional impact on the bus driver and his family and work colleagues, as well as on the little girl's family.

Through this simple piece of drama, First Group was able to get across a powerful message: that each and every employee is personally responsible for health and safety. It created a lasting emotional trigger that helped staff think about responsibility, and the consequences of their actions. The play encouraged the audience to ask themselves important questions such as: what if that were me? How would I cope? Could I live with the guilt? What impact do my actions have on others?

During breaks in *Jim's Story*, the audience were invited to discuss the key issues covered in the play. In this way, drama sparked discussion and debate, posed difficult questions and forced people to consider the issues at hand. There were no hiding places. At the end of the sessions, each participant was given a little girl's hair bobble as a reminder of the child who was killed. Though a simple gesture, this had a powerful and lasting impact.



For First Group, the adoption of drama as a training technique has also been a way of winning hearts and minds, and creating a realistic, believable and engaging learning environment for its staff

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PASSENGER TRANSPORT

3 FOCUS DECEMBER 2009

Naveed Qamar, Group Safety Director, First Group comments: 'The reaction to Jim's Story when it was first performed at a conference was beyond our expectations. There was a real buzz that never existed before. For the first time we witnessed an emotional engagement and opening of the minds to the safety message.'

Jim's Story has been so successful that First Group has introduced the programme to over 1,500 operators worldwide.

**Health and safety leadership**

First Group realised that a successful shift in attitudes required both bottom-up and the top-down change. For long-term results, managers would need to have a clear understanding of health and safety procedures, develop skills to manage health and safety programmes more effectively, and learn how to influence and change attitudes themselves. This would require leadership training and development.

**'The Mother's Story'**

While *Jim's Story* focused primarily on front-line workers, *The Mother's Story* was designed specifically for managers. It, too, was performed at First Group's UK conference in Warwick, and for at a smaller safety conference for Scotrail in Glasgow. For Scotrail, the scenario was adapted to include a rail fatality, and was watched by 100 managers from health and safety to operations.

*The Mother's Story* was a follow-up to *Jim's Story*, looking at the same scenario a year down the line. The little girl's mother discovers that the safety procedures on the bus had not been followed through. She goes to the newspapers with the story, and sues the company for corporate manslaughter. The play ends with the audience voting on whether the managing director of the bus/rail company is guilty of corporate manslaughter.

*The Mother's Story* highlights issues surrounding liability, as well as encouraging managers to think about leadership and implementing procedures. Through discussion, the audience explores the actions that should have been taken, while highlighting and recognising the MD's mistakes. Forum Interactive stops the action at key points, enabling managers to intervene and provide new strategies and techniques for the fictional MD to initiate.

The theme running through *The Mother's Story* is simply the importance of senior managers modelling the correct approach to safety and the importance of practising what you preach, being committed and showing it. Drama conveys these messages in a controlled, yet real and believable environment.

**Transformational leadership**

At both events, *The Mother's Story* was followed by a series of forums looking at the subject of transformational leadership. These sessions allowed participants to engage with a particular safety problem whilst testing transformational and transactional leadership qualities. This was designed to help managers get a sense of different leadership styles, and use these to solve problems.

Forum Interactive created a series of scenarios based in a manufacturing plant, and participants worked through the protagonist – the manager – to resolve the issue at hand, and change the attitudes and behaviour of the staff.

The action could be stopped, rewound and erased, enabling participants to practise leadership techniques and see the outcomes in real time. This proved helpful in enabling managers to learn from their decisions, as well as develop new skills.

**Discussing and sharing safety strategies: The World Café**

One of First Group's final challenges was to encourage its managers to discuss and share successful health and safety strategies and find new solutions to existing problems, as well as a mechanism that allowed them to distribute helpful techniques to other staff members. To this end Forum Interactive created a series of World Café events for Scotrail's safety conference in Glasgow and First Group's Injury Prevention Programme. The World Café's were small events for up to 20 managers. A series of short scenes were shown at strategic points during the event, with each scene posing a different challenging question for the delegates to discuss. For example:

The workplace can be a potentially hazardous environment. For long-term results, managers need to have a clear understanding of health and safety procedures, develop skills to manage health and safety programmes more effectively, and learn how to influence and change attitudes themselves.





First Group and Forum Interactive have been delivering a series of workshops, road shows and events across many subsidiaries, including First Manchester, Scotrail, First Group America (Laidlaw and Greyhound), and First Great Western

- What does it mean to care in the context of your work?
- What is your role and responsibility in terms of safety within your organisation?

At the end of each scene, the delegates broke out into different tables to discuss the issues being raised in the play, raising awareness and understanding along the way.

The discussions then moved on to managers' individual problems around safety. They were encouraged to share these with the group and collectively work towards solutions using paired coaching. They were asked to talk about their challenges and objectives, and propose a way forward. The pairs then went away and worked together over a six-month period, supporting and coaching each other to achieve their goals.

Here are some real life examples of the kind of issues that were raised by Scotrail managers, and the solutions development to overcome these challenges:

**Elaine**

**Objectives:** to build trust in raising and reporting issues that are affecting staff; to initiate staff team building.

**Way forward:**

- Arrange tours of station to identify problems

- Encourage responsibility in incorporating into brief to communicate to others.

**John**

**Objective:** a reduction in accidents – staff and public – attributed to his organisation

**Way forward:**

- Formulate safety action plans
- Have regular meetings with safety reps to get their input
- Drive through the actions to meet the above objective

This collaborative approach resulted in increased communication across and upwards within the Scotrail organisation, as well as an increase in the culture of shared problem-solving around safety.

**Conclusion**

Although First Group's work on health and safety is far from over, it has already made big strides. Drama has helped the group to create impact where before it was faced with apathy. It has engaged staff and managers, stimulated discussion, changed attitudes and fundamentally altered people's perception toward health and safety and its impact on the working environment. The two organisations will continue to work together through 2009 and 2010 delivering experiential learning.



**About the author**

**Tess Allen**, Director, Forum Interactive, has over 20 years' experience as an actor, director, facilitator and teacher of theatre and drama. Within Forum Interactive, she has extensive experience of devising, delivering and project managing theatre-based learning and development programmes for public and private sectors organisations. She specialises in equality and diversity, and health and safety.

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