



Announcer:

It's time for the *IHSA Safety Podcast*.

Ken Rayner:

Welcome to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*. I'm your host, Ken Rayner. On today's episode of the podcast, we're going to discuss training versus competency with IHSA's Maren Gamble. Welcome back to the podcast, Maren.

Maren Gamble:

Thanks, Ken. I'm excited to be back.

Ken Rayner:

Well, it's always great to have you here to share your expertise and knowledge with our listeners. And I believe it's safe to say based on what we're going to talk about today, that many employers confuse training with competency. Now, training can be a tool to achieve competency, but training doesn't necessarily mean someone is competent. Would you agree with that statement, Maren?

Maren Gamble:

Absolutely, Ken. I think that's going to be at the heart of our conversation today, is really looking at those two concepts and how they relate but aren't the same. And how we can use that when we're building systems.

Ken Rayner:

Okay, beautiful. And, Maren, I know on other podcasts that we've done together, we've started the podcast first by explaining what we are going to cover in the podcast and what we're not going to cover in this podcast. So, do you want to start there?

Maren Gamble:

I do. I think we've gotten into some of these topics, Ken, around some of the words and the jargon of health and safety and why it is important to have an understanding of what they mean. And I think what that also means is, what they don't mean when we're talking in these podcasts.

. So when we're considering competency and training, I want to say upfront that what we're not intending to do today is, describe competency from a legal standpoint. Competent is something that appears in legislation and regulations and has a very specific legal meaning that we will chat about today as it influences how you want to look at these things. But what you and I are doing today is not giving legal advice to our listeners.

Ken Rayner:

Thank goodness. I'm looking on my wall and I don't see a law degree, so thank you, Maren. That's good news.

Maren Gamble:

It's the limit of our competency on this one, Ken. Stop short of that.

Ken Rayner:

Oh, so watching *LA Law* or some other show for the training perspective didn't make me competent for a law degree?

Maren Gamble:

Yeah, tough news. If you spent a lot of time on that, Ken, unfortunately it's not going to help here. So just to let our listeners know that we're not going to that extent with this. What we really are using is, some of the understanding around what the language is, how I like to think about it as a system builder, as an occupational health and safety management system builder to help me build those systems. If anyone listening wants to know something specific about their legal obligations, we always encourage them to seek legal advice. Competent legal advice on that topic. The other caveat or discussion that I want to have about what we are and aren't talking about is, we're not talking about competency in a specific application today. You have another podcast, Ken, already that was on supervisor competency. And there's also one out there on the core podcast series page on training versus competency that really looks at those concepts from the core audit tool perspective.

Today's conversation is really taking a step back from even those specifics and those are great resources if any of our listeners would like to go hear about those topics. We're taking a step back and actually just saying conceptually, before you would even dig into those specifics of building your system, how are we going to think about training and competency and the distinctions between them.

Ken Rayner:

So training and competency I think are two terms that somewhat get used interchangeably. Can you expand on why that is maybe problematic?

Maren Gamble:

So one of the things that comes up with that is, we're not using the word competency the way you might use it in day-to-day use. So the word does appear in legislation and regulation with a specific meaning, but that brings up some challenges if we use the word itself, because competency or the idea

of being incompetent can really evoke some feelings. It might feel insulting. If I were to walk up to you, Ken, when we're in the halls at the IHSA Voyager Court office and say, "Hey Ken, I saw what you were doing for your job the other day. And man, you're incompetent." I have a feeling our conversation wouldn't be as lighthearted as our conversations normally are, and that wouldn't come across as a positive form of feedback. So when we're talking about these words, we do tend to avoid the use of the legal concept of competency when we're talking to our staff.

And as a result, the only things that we talk about with our staff in terms of building that competency, tend to revolve around what kind of training do you need to have. Or we'll talk about, "I need you to go job shadow here or I need you to go do this." So we'll talk about the specific pieces that build competency, but we don't go up to anybody, and I would strongly recommend that you not start telling people they're incompetent, if anyone's listening today. But it means that they are used interchangeably in the real world. The field staff are just being told what training they need to sign up for. And so from that perspective, it really falls to, again, those who are building the system, building the occupational health and safety management system, to consider the idea of competency and what goes into that.

So they're going to look at training, which we will talk about today, Ken, is a piece of competency. But they're going to look at the big picture around competency and how they want to verify it and how they want to ensure it's in place, is to meet those legal requirements without necessarily having to explain or use that language all the way down to the field level.

Ken Rayner:

So how about... Maren, on lots of other podcasts and we don't need to go into the baking example. I think we've used that exhaustively in what we've done. But, I think what you've done a great job of on these podcasts is really using some very basic examples to articulate and explain some of these concepts. So, do you think we could get into that today? Could we pick an example that we could use, that would apply to just about everybody that's listening, so they can really get a sense as to what we're talking about here in terms of competency and training?

Maren Gamble:

One of the examples that I've used previously when I'm talking to firms about these two concepts is the idea of driving. Operating just a passenger vehicle. In Ontario, it's the G driver's license that I'm talking about. And we have the graduated licensing system. And I think a number of us, whether we have that license or not, we have a sense of what goes into driving a vehicle and becoming competent to drive a vehicle, as well as the number of risks that are associated with driving a passenger vehicle. So I think it is a good example in that sense. Slightly off-topic, Ken, how I always like to bring up some things that are running through my mind as we're doing this. IHSA actually does have a pretty awesome eLearning module available on our website for distracted driving which can go through some of those risks.

If any of our listeners are interested in exploring what those risks might be associated with distracted driving, it is one of the things that IHSA staff actually take every three years to keep us fresh on that topic. The other one we have is a defensive driving course. Both in eLearning and in-person formats, which we also take as IHSA staff, again to look at some of those specific risks. I know that was a bit off-topic, but hey, while we're talking about driving, got to bring it in.

Ken Rayner:

Yeah, great suggestions.

Maren Gamble:

But if we use that as our example, Ken, if that's okay with you, we might as well brainstorm some pieces around it in terms of competency and the training component. I know for me it was a number of years now when I wrote my G1 license test, but Ken, is it something that you're familiar with as well while we brainstorm?

Ken Rayner:

Oh boy, that goes back a long ways, Maren. But yeah, for definitely my children, our children going through it, yes, I do have... For them, not for myself, but yeah, the graduated license, I'm familiar with it. Yep.

Maren Gamble:

Beautiful. So, assuming that I was going to be a new driver or thinking about your children recently when they were going to be a new driver and assuming that maybe they knew nothing going into it, what's something that they needed? Before they could even sit in the car with you and start that potentially harrowing process of building competency, what are some of the things? Let's brainstorm that you want them to have?

Ken Rayner:

Well, the first thing before, I guess legally in Ontario, they at least have to get the G1. So they've got to go... And number one, they've got to turn 16. So legally be 16 years of age in Ontario. I think they've got to pass some eye exam to demonstrate whether or not they need corrective eyewear while they're driving. And then there's a, I think a fairly basic test that they can study for in a booklet about the rules of the road and the signage on the road. That's pretty much it. That gets them at least into the driver's seat, right?

Maren Gamble:

Right. That's exactly right. So that idea of the license and passing a basic knowledge test first, is definitely a component that we can relate to there. And that's going to be able to verify for the system, the licensing system that this person, before they're getting in that car for the first time, at least knows what the road signs mean. I'm thinking about what else might we build on from there. So, you might start doing some hands-on training in the car with your child. I know it can be a tough time where there's some stress involved. So sometimes we do source that out to a third party as well to give us some additional driver education training and we might send our passenger driver learner here to a program, to achieve a certificate in terms of driver education and to get more training.

Ken Rayner:

And Maren, for us, one of the things we did with both of our kids was, early on a Saturday morning or a Sunday morning, we took them to a really big public parking lot near our home where there might've been one car and just let them drive around in that parking lot with very minimal hazards, just getting the feel of the car, understanding what it's like to have to park it in a defined parking spot, to be able to reverse, to be able to turn left, turn right, things that we take for granted. But they're not going to get a sense of any of that by just writing a G1 exam. That's all just knowledge-based. Now it's practically applying what they've learned and then getting a feel for how it all works out. So that's what we did, which I think was an easy step to allow them to at least get some sense of awareness and understanding of what it's like to drive a car.

Maren Gamble:

Absolutely, and you're bringing back memories for me too in the parking lot. There was a big mall parking lot in Kitchener where I grew up that I spent a decent amount of time in with my parents as well. And what that represents is building experience. Building experience in the most controlled environments first and then introducing more and more realistic scenarios as we build that experience. What also is something that we can consider in terms of this idea of learning to drive a vehicle is, also learning how other people drive. It's one thing to just operate the vehicle if all the roads were empty and everything's clear and the conditions are all normal. But, we also do need to build a knowledge base, build some experience with the driving norms of the area that we're in. Driving in Toronto is different than driving in Kenora.

Ken Rayner:

Absolutely.

Maren Gamble:

Driving in Ontario is different than driving in other places around the world with different driving norms. Certainly in Canada and Ontario we also face weather conditions that we need to build experience around to be able to drive competently in the end.

Ken Rayner:

Yeah, 100 per cent. So can you imagine, even someone that gets their G2 and hasn't had a lot of experience driving around Toronto. And then you take them on that first day where they've got their own license and send them to Toronto's Pearson airport at spring break to navigate through that maze. So even though they've got the training in that regard, there's no way that they're even close to competent to being able to be put in that situation because they're just so different.

Maren Gamble:

Absolutely. And so, we just had an example and we brought up all these different pieces that we would want to go through ourselves or to have our children grow through in order to build some competency. And certainly this will take time. And for some, the amount of experience you need and the amount of practice is going to take more than others. And that's normal as well. Certainly, Ken, I'll admit that I probably needed a little more practice when I was starting before I became comfortable than some

others and all of that is fine. And I think that draws some parallels to the workplace as well. But the one thing that was interesting about what we just said there, Ken, we talked about needing some knowledge. We talked about potentially needing some, definitely needing some training, whether it be an informal training with your parents or a formal training program or both. And then the importance of experience.

We mentioned training specifically in there, which is of course one-half of our podcast, but competency wasn't... We used the word throughout it, but competency wasn't one of the items we listed. And what I wanted to highlight with that is the reason for that is, that all of those things we listed. That knowledge test, that experience, that training that we're going to be looking to have, all of those form pieces of the idea of competency. So competency is more of the umbrella term for when you've put all of those pieces together, the knowledge, the training, the experience, and you've identified that this person is now ready to safely perform the task.

Ken Rayner:

You make it sound so simple, Maren, when you put it that way. And so why do you think there's been confusion?

Maren Gamble:

The confusion really comes into the fact that we don't necessarily always think about verifying the full concept of competency. Again, we mentioned earlier that it's simple to schedule, attend, and verify a training program. And training programs are an important piece certainly. But as we identified with the driving example, if you had just sent someone to a driver training program and they weren't learning the rules of the road and they weren't getting the parking lot experience and all those different pieces, we wouldn't want them to go drive to Pearson on spring break. We'd only be talking about a piece of the puzzle. And so the idea of stepping back and looking at competency as a more overarching piece is important. It is speaking more directly to the legal obligations of an employer, and it also is what's actually bringing confidence that an employee in your workplace is competent, is ready to perform that work safely?

If we want to look at competency and where it's found in the official pieces of our system in Ontario, it's found in the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. It's found in the regulations for construction projects. You're also going to find it in both the COR[®] audit tool, the COR[®] program, as well as the Health and Safety Excellence program, as fundamental topics that have been identified as key components to an occupational health and safety management system. If I were to look at all those different places I just mentioned, the Act, the regulations, the COR[®] standard and Health and Safety Excellence program, there's some common themes in terms of what competency is looking at. And that's what I want to approach today in terms of our conversation, is what are those pieces that are common to all these references in terms of competency? To help us understand what we're looking at.

And you and I can already generally pull them out in our example. So, knowledge, training, and experience are common themes. And we need to make sure that we have those components, whether we're going to be performing the work or organizing the work. Because what you need to perform the work versus plan it might be slightly different things. And also considering that specifically some of the knowledge you have to have with respect to what the legal requirements are for that work and what the

hazards and therefore controls associated with that work should be. It means it's much bigger than taking a course. It's bigger than doing some research and gathering some information. It's even bigger than "I've done that before and it didn't go wrong".

Ken Rayner:

And Maren, we talked about in the last podcast we did together in regards to hazards. If you had a great system behind you but you missed the hazards, you miss the whole point of it. I take it that, if you're building an occupational health and safety management system and you're not as crystal clear on competency and what's required, again, it may not be giving you the outcome that you're looking for.

Maren Gamble:

That's right. A lot of firms that I've interacted with through my experience with COR® and the excellence program have really beautiful training, tracking methods, training matrices, and ways to make sure that everybody has the training they need. But what we don't always do in our systems is track competency. And at the end of the day, it's that competency piece that's really critical to whether that person should be performing the task. And so, I think that's really what the heart of our chat today is, encouraging everyone who's listening to move beyond the idea of verifying training and into the idea of verifying competency. Maybe we could do another example, Ken?

Ken Rayner:

Oh, I love your examples. Let's do another one.

Maren Gamble:

I'm thinking about operating a forklift to just load a truck for delivery out to a construction project. I think this is something that for a lot of our member firms, happens as part of their work. So maybe we can think about what that would mean in terms of, if we were very verifying just training, Ken, what do you think we'd look for an operator of the forklift?

Ken Rayner:

For an operator, I think just the very basics. Just in terms of how they're able to... Do they know the basics of how to operate it probably in a controlled environment? Are they aware of the fueling systems and things of that nature. There's so many other variables, and I'm just thinking about myself. So I learned how to operate a forklift probably when I was about 14 or 15 at a local nursery in Toronto. And so, I would be taking skids of topsoil or different things, moving it around the nursery. But that doesn't mean that you can drop me in the middle of Amazon in a three million square foot facility and have me operate it there. I had basic skills, but I certainly, I wouldn't deem myself to be competent in all aspects of being a forklift operator.

Maren Gamble:

So I think you hit on a few key pieces there. So experience that you're talking about there is with handling the machine. So experience handling the specific machine that you're being asked to, the

specific accessories necessary, the specific task you're being asked to do, but also the specific environment and external factors that are going on. So, you'd be looking for a lot of different experience to assist in your competency there.

Ken Rayner:

And I was only trained on one type of forklift.

Maren Gamble:

You were only trained on one type of forklift.

Ken Rayner:

It wasn't a stand-up Raymond reach. It wasn't different sort of varieties. It was just one type. And that's all I was trained on.

Maren Gamble:

And that's a fabulous point because when we're verifying training, say we're looking to hire a new forklift operator and someone comes in for an interview. A lot of the time, at that point, we're verifying training first, because a line item potentially on the resume, tells you which certificates and licenses they may have earned. Which tells you which training they will have taken in the past. So you'll want to look at the training records that they have and say, how current are they? How relevant are they to the machine that you have and the types of accessories that you're using. You also want to make sure that it goes beyond that. Did they complete that certificate two weeks ago and have limited experience beyond that? And do they have knowledge and training with your specific machine is going to be the next question.

Ken Rayner:

I love that example too, Maren, because there's a big... When we talk about training and then applying the training, that's important too. Because if I took a forklift course and I successfully completed it, everything was legit, but then I didn't operate a forklift for three months and then I finally got a position being able to be a forklift operator, how much of that have I retained? Because I haven't done anything in that three-month time.

Maren Gamble:

Absolutely, Ken. And I think that's something that we do see come up as an influencing factor in the real world as well. So we know there would be knowledge, training and experience. Based on our specific conversation there, that would come into this example. I wonder if it would be good for us, Ken, to talk about each of those specifically and what do they mean and how would you even go about verifying it? A training matrix is pretty straightforward. Do you have this? Yes or no? What's the expiry date? But, there might be some questions around some of the other pieces of the full concept of competency.

Ken Rayner:

All right. You want to start with knowledge first?

Maren Gamble:

Always. Let's always start with knowledge first, Ken. I love it. So when I think of knowledge, what I'm thinking of with this is facts. These are things you can know, things that you'd find itemized in an encyclopedia, for those of us who remember what an encyclopedia is.

Ken Rayner:

Oh, there's a whole bunch of people under the age of 25 that are scratching their heads right now going, "What is an encyclopedia?" We're dating ourselves, Maren, and we're really dating ourselves.

Maren Gamble:

That's right. That's right. It's something that can be communicated in a huge variety of ways. These are the facts and just the facts. So if you look at what IHSA even offers in terms of our programs, there is a distinction between a program that's designed to transfer knowledge and a program that's designed to be a more full training delivery. So if you look at our awareness programs, those ones are really intended to communicate a really concise and curated piece of information, piece of knowledge to those who are there. And the records for those programs are records of attendance. So they don't usually have... I don't think they ever have knowledge verification at the end or any kind of test. Because what they really are is a transfer of knowledge that you've attended and received the facts presented to you, if that makes any sense.

Ken Rayner:

Oh, big sense. Yep.

Maren Gamble:

For that kind of thing, if we're looking to verify knowledge, again, it's have you received the facts? Sure. You might want to see a record of attendance at an IHSA program, if you think that's of value. But there's other ways that we could approach that within our organization as well, Ken. If we wanted to know if someone knows something, what do you think we could do?

Ken Rayner:

We could evaluate them ourselves.

Maren Gamble:

We absolutely could. And if they attended an awareness-only program, we might want to do that when they get back anyway.

Ken Rayner:

Absolutely.

Maren Gamble:

To see if they actually did pick up what we were hoping they could pick up. So an evaluation, an interview, sometimes even observing the work can help us, because you'll be able to identify if there's something that they're not knowing or understanding.

Ken Rayner:

And I'm so glad you brought that up, Maren, because I think that's something that employers, if sending their employees to training at IHSA, may not always look at that record of training to see, did they attend the training or did they successfully complete the training? And that successful completion indicates that there was an evaluation at the end, that the participant most likely had to at least score more than 75 per cent to be deemed to be okay. They successfully completed the course because they were able to articulate back to us of the knowledge that they had gained during that time.

Maren Gamble:

Exactly, exactly. So the idea of knowledge as a more static thing than training in full is something that we can use. It's just the facts. It's just communicating information. But what that means for training, Ken, in terms of what's different about training then? When I go to training, I get told facts. So how is that any different? Training is typically our chance to take some of that knowledge, some specific knowledge, and apply it to a specific context now. So, training is the process of learning new skills that are around how you need to do a particular job or activity properly. So it's taking that static information and giving it life, giving it movement into a particular job or activity that we're trying to develop skill around. Training will have to include some communication of key knowledge, that you are needing in order to develop those skills.

Some training, there's prerequisites because there's a lot of prior knowledge that you might need before you can develop the skill. If you look at some of our programs around elevating work platforms or swing stages, you have to have Working at Heights training first. Because that is a prerequisite and substantial amount of knowledge and a skill set that we're looking for. But training doesn't necessarily include all the knowledge for the task.

Ken Rayner:

Oh, there's no way it could.

Maren Gamble:

Right. Exactly.

Ken Rayner:

At IHSA, our courses are generics. They're intended to give you a wide understanding of say, the hazards or how to control the hazards. But when you go back to your workplace, you may have very different hazards there.

Maren Gamble:

Absolutely. And you probably do. I can't think of any example where a workplace would be completely captured in IHSA's program, because IHSA's program is intended to cover what applies to everyone. So everyone needs to look at what's specific to their organization as well, because all of those pieces have two components. The general information and your company specific information. And if you go to our courses, the presentations will include information along those lines as well. If you take working at heights, it's giving you a certificate to show that you know the required pieces under legislation. But when you go back to your company, you do still need to understand the company specific applications of that information.

Ken Rayner:

Is that where experience starts to come into play?

Maren Gamble:

It absolutely is. But also company specific training. So, training is not necessarily one program. Training can be a combination of things. Training can be something that's provided externally through someone like IHSA. It can also be something that's developed in-house in an organization. The key thing with training is that, it's taking that knowledge and helping you learn the skill using workshops, activities, hands-on demonstration, communication of information that's going to help transform just the facts into a trained skill. So when we're looking at trying to develop competency, you can see how there's many layers that start to form, Ken. We need to make sure they know all the right things. We need to make sure that they've been trained in the skill components of it. That might be a combination of internal and external factors. If there's a license or certification required under law, we also need to make sure that's covered. So we mentioned the working at heights certificate. There are many applications in construction where that's going to be a legal requirement to perform the work.

Ken Rayner:

Okay. Is there anything else you want to touch on experience? You want to get into that?

Maren Gamble:

So for experience, now that we've got essentially our knowledge, which was just the facts. And our training, which took those facts and applied them to learning a skill, experience is putting that newly acquired skill into a real life scenario and giving it real-life context. So this is where you know how to now do a skill based on your training. What does it look like in the real world? How is that forklift operation different in the nursery for a 14-year-old, versus in a big warehouse with potentially 1,000 people moving around? So now we're actually building experience in our practical real life scenarios, to be comfortable that we know what we're doing in the specifics of the environment.

Ken Rayner:

So we talk about experience. Only through experience, can you become competent if you don't have knowledge and training? So if someone's been doing something for 20 years, seemingly hasn't had any issues, doesn't necessarily mean they're good, maybe they're lucky. But does that amount of experience relate into competency on its own?

Maren Gamble:

So, what I would always say with this, I always say, can you be sure it does? Can we be sure if we don't check? Oh, I would suggest to everyone that you always want to double-check all the parts. Because if someone's been doing something for 20 years, maybe they've even been doing it for 20 years with your organization. You might feel very, very confident about their experience. And we know intuitively that that comes with some knowledge and probably some training on that component. But until we actually check, are we confident that they have what we expect them to have? So within that 20 years of experience, is it on this machine? Is it with these accessories? Is it in this context? Are they aware of recent updates to regulations or best practices? Are they aware of our company policies and procedures that we've put in place? Maybe there's pedestrian right of way that we've put in place.

Their training. How recent is it? If they did their training 20 years ago, does that still meet the expectation of what we want them to be trained on now? And so, someone having 20 years of experience, my goodness, that's a great place to start, because there's an incredible experience component of competency. But we can't just take that to mean that the other pieces are automatically verified. We want to check those too.

Ken Rayner:

Perfect. You made that very clear. That was good, Maren. Thank you so much. Okay, so going back to our driving example. And maybe just how does knowledge, training, and experience apply then to our driving example?

Maren Gamble:

So if I was looking at the system, and of course the system has been built here around the idea of verifying competency in order to issue that full G license. That's truly what this system was built to do. So that G1 license can, is that first piece of the puzzle where we're doing a knowledge test. So it's the verification of the bare minimum of knowledge associated with the rules of the road and driving a vehicle in this province. A verification method for that is a test. We're just using a knowledge test to actually verify that. Training. We definitely need to introduce some sort of driver's education program or training with the parents, usually both. Or if it's not the parents, someone else that has that confidence in their ability to share the information. Verification of those pieces, you'd get a certificate of completion if you're doing a driver's education program.

You'd be getting parents' feedback if you were doing it more informally with your vehicle. And then as you move through, there is a graduated licensing system. So, you'd be going for your more advanced license verifications, your G2 and your G, when you do qualify to have that official testing done to see if you've met those new thresholds, with each step bringing new or I guess fewer restrictions to it as well. Experience. It's just time behind the wheel. How much time do you spend behind the wheel and how much time it takes each person can be different. The amount of time, quite honestly, it took for my parents to let me take the car by myself was different than the amount of time it ended up for my brothers and sisters. I might've been a little bit of a slower learner on that one, Ken, than they were. But that's the thing. That's why we had to verify through their feedback and ongoing feedback to identify when those thresholds and that competency for each person had been met. And of course then the final validation is that testing through the official licensing system.

Ken Rayner:

Absolutely. And then it's where are they driving to? Because I can remember our children, we live in a small town and our children said, "Hey, can we borrow the car?", after they got their license to go see some friends? That's one thing. "Hey, I'd like to take the car downtown tonight, to downtown Toronto and drive around." That's going to be a whole another conversation. "Because then now you have experience to drive around our small town. You have the training and the competency. I would deem you competent. I'm giving you the car, so I must be deeming you competent. I'm entrusting it with you. But boy, I'm not feeling so good about you driving it downtown Toronto at night. Sorry. You've never been down there, you're not aware of it. We're going to have to do another level of training, and I'm going to have to probably take... I will come with you and let's do it together to make sure you're comfortable." Completely different.

Maren Gamble:

And I think what you highlight there, Ken, is that, competency isn't just identified and then it's done, either. You can be determined to be competent to perform in a certain task, in a certain environment, certain conditions. But if those things change, it is important to continually be re-evaluating that competency piece to say, under these new conditions, is competency still in place? Am I still comfortable that the knowledge training and experience are all in place to say this person is going to be able to do it safely? And we do see that, that idea of change in the workplace can be a contributor to when accidents happen and questions about that competency might arise, because they were deemed competent in one scenario, but the scenario did change. And so that's where programs, when you're building your system, you want to think about things like your management-of-change processes, your hazard-assessment processes, to make sure you're capturing those changes and identifying how that affects your competency consideration, in terms of your controls and things like that.

Ken Rayner:

Absolutely. You know Maren, I just thought of a story. So our son came home last year and told us that —he takes Brazilian jiu-jitsu—and told us that he had achieved his blue belt. His adult blue belt.

Maren Gamble:

Awesome.

Ken Rayner:

And that's what I said. I said, "Great." And then my next question was, "What does that mean?" And I was really interested to hear his response. He said to me, "It means that I'm competent." And I said, "Oh, okay." I said, "Well, what does that mean?" And typically it takes, I guess about two to three years to achieve your blue belt. But he said, "Well, what that tells higher belts, like a black belt for example, is that they can spar or what they call "roll" with me. Because I have the basic understanding of the art, I have the basic understanding of the techniques. And so there's a level that's been achieved that says, "Okay, now you have a full understanding of everything. You're not an expert, but you have a full enough understanding that you can now spar and roll with higher belts because it's been deemed that you know what you're doing."

And I thought that was a really interesting take on that. I had never heard that before from a martial arts perspective. And I thought it was a really nice standard to set to say, "Hey, when you achieve a blue belt, you're deemed to be competent in that."

Maren Gamble:

I love that, Ken. I think that's a perfect example of a system that exists just in our society, outside of occupational health and safety management systems, which really addresses this idea of verifying knowledge, training, and experience to determine when it's safe to perform certain tasks. And of course, that colour system, the belt-colour system, identifies a specific meaning. I love that to say what is safe so that people can at-a-glance understand not only the task that your son is then qualified to do, but to which degree and under which conditions. I think that's just incredible. It's probably a little bit nerdy to say, Ken, but it gives me chills when I see a system that's so well established to determine competency like that, and so well accepted and your son using competency casually like that and it's not to tell someone they're incompetent and offend them. That's amazing.

Ken Rayner:

No, and it's to keep them safe, really. Because you don't want someone who's a white belt rolling with a black belt. They're probably going to get hurt.

Maren Gamble:

Right.

Ken Rayner:

Or it's just there's going to be such a divide between the two of them that it's not going to work out for either one of them. They're not going to get the outcome they want because the black belt's not going to get anything out of it, and the white belt's not going to get anything out of it.

Maren Gamble:

And I think that's amazing because in a perfect world, in our occupational health and safety management systems, we could devise something as clever, simple and effective as that. I'm not saying we should go put belts on all of our employees in terms of a tagging system, but that idea of having something that is so clear and so simple with specific meanings is what we're looking as an organization to develop with the idea of competency. And it's not just you've taken the class to do this thing, but you've also... I'm assuming your son had to complete a test of some sort, a demonstration to achieve that belt?

Ken Rayner:

By someone who is, I believe, at least a black belt or higher than a black belt. Like a double. Whatever's higher than a black belt. But, yeah. So there's somebody that has that knowledge that deems them. Yep. We're going to now be able to put you in a situation where you're not going to get hurt, where you're not going to be above and feeling like you're a fish out of water. You're going to be okay.

Maren Gamble:

I love it. Because in the workplace context, that's the equivalent of saying a senior member of your team, who has that knowledge, training, and experience proven in your organization and in the task, just potentially doing the observations and verifications to make sure that newer employee does have that knowledge training and experience to do it as well. And yeah, as I say, it kind of gives me chills. I love it. It's a perfect example. In this case, Ken, I think that's a good one to move forward from here.

Ken Rayner:

And Maren, listen. I know after doing this podcast with you, I will never, ever confuse training with competency again. That's never going to happen with me. Is there anything else you want to add in terms of training versus competency?

Maren Gamble:

I probably always add a bit of a caveat probably at the end of these things. A little disclaimer. We've talked about the concepts of training and competency today. If we wanted to develop a program from here, we'd have to start looking at how we're actually going to use these in our organization's specific occupational health and safety management system. We mentioned a few ideas here today. We didn't go too deep into that. Our next step... you and I can, if we were to continue in this process, would be taking that understanding of competency versus training now as abstract concepts and really and truly applying them to the positions in our organization. So looking at each position and saying, what are the competencies we need to verify for this position? And within that competency need, how do we verify knowledge, training, and experience? And how do we gather that information?

How do we track it, and how do we also review it regularly enough to make sure we're capturing those changing conditions? So, we'd have to do a more formalized and systematic exercise of moving through those positions in our organization, considering literacy, language skills, ability, likelihood of exposure, the specific positions as we move through to make sure we're capturing everyone. We'd also have to consider who's managing this system. How are we administering it? Who's scheduling training? Who's tracking training? Who's doing knowledge verification? Who might be the mentor that's able to verify if someone's ready? And really putting some specifics to it, you and I can't tell an organization today how to do that for their reality, because it is going to be different for every organization out there. And that's where there are programs that we believe in at IHSA that are going to assist firms in tackling these things systematically. It does appear in our core standard, it appears in the Health and Safety Excellence program to assist people in moving through these. And of course, generally consultants can assist with this as well.

Ken Rayner:

Excellent. Maren, thank you so much. Really appreciate how you can take something that's I think fairly complex and just make it very simple for everybody to understand. I've got a much better understanding of it. Thanks to you. So thank you again, Maren. Love having you as a guest on the podcast. Appreciate it.

Maren Gamble:

Thank you, Ken.

Ken Rayner:

And thank you to the listeners to listening to the *IHSA Safety Podcast* and our episode on training and competency. Be sure to subscribe and “like” us on your podcast channel and visit us at ihsa.ca for a wealth of health and safety resources and information.

Announcer:

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