



Conquer Distracted Driving by Becoming an ACE

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Although cell phones are responsible for a large percentage of distracted-driving accidents, they are not the only contributory factor. Longer commutes in cities and more travel hours in work settings further complicate the issue. Many organizations attempt to address the issues with either new policies or new training, or a combination of the two.

The policy approach to reducing distracted driving almost always involves limiting or forbidding cell-phone use while driving on the job. These policies have proven to be effective, but not sufficient to prevent this class of accidents. The limitations largely fall into two categories: 1) Workers still use phones while driving off the job; and 2) limiting cell-phone use does not address other distractions of driving.

While most distracted-driving training is well-conceived, it's not necessarily memorable. The focus seems to be on presentation rather than retention. If the concepts don't stick in people's minds, the concepts won't find root in their safety habits. For this reason, consider adopting the acronym "ACE" and using it to make distracted-driving concepts stick.

The "A" of ACE stands for "attention." Many training modules for distracted driving refer to this category of distraction with terms such as "conscious," "cognitive" or "mental." While such terms technically are accurate, they neither are memorable nor prescriptive. Avoiding such distractions requires paying attention to your driving. Anything that distracts your attention from your driving compromises your safety.

Phone conversations – even on hands-free devices – divert driver attention. Likewise, so do conversations with passengers, listening to recorded materials that require mental activity or simply letting your mind drift deeply into non-driving thoughts. The first step of being a driving ACE is to maintain your attention on your driving.

The "C" of ACE stands for "control." Other terminology used for this category is "manual distraction" or "physical distraction" and, again, may be descriptive, but is not prescriptive. Anything that requires drivers to reach might take their hands off the wheel or compromise their ideal driving position.

Anticipating the need to reach for items *before* starting a trip can help drivers choose better locations for sunglasses, water bottles and other items that might be needed along the way. Wearing a seatbelt ensures that a driver cannot be easily moved out of the driver's seat in a collision or skid, thus improving control. Setting cruise control and crossing your legs while driving requires more time to break in an emergency and, thus, reduces control. The second step in being a driving ACE is to maintain control of the vehicle and manage issues that could compromise control.

The "E" of ACE stands for "eyes," as in "eyes on the road." Many training modules refer to this as "visual distractions," which is an adequate descriptor, but does not provide a memorable label for the

solution to the problem. When drivers remember the term "eyes on the road," then anything that takes their eyes off the road becomes the distraction.

Looking at a cell-phone display, reading a map, looking around the vehicle for your sunglasses, staring at something on or near the road (such as police cars or wreckers) or admiring the scenery take the driver's eyes off the road. Some driver-training methodologies suggest that a driver begin counting seconds when they look away from the road and make sure they return their focus to the road after no more than three seconds. Other training approaches recognize the need to focus and scan, i.e. to look at the traffic lane and stripes, but then occasionally glance at the bigger picture of the entire roadway to avoid visual fatigue. Many approaches can be effective, but only if the driver first remembers the principle of "eyes on the road."

It's not enough to internalize these three principles for avoiding distracted driving; it's also critical to emphasize that *all three principles apply to every situation*. Doing one or two of these things doesn't make you a driving ACE; you must pay attention to all three. Being an ACE also is not just a matter of what you do while you're driving. It requires a driver to pre-plan his drive to minimize distractions and to be willing to stop if distractions build up and can't be addressed on the move.

Personalize Training

Since most people react emotionally before they react logically, consider beginning the training session with a story of a person affected by a distracted-driving incident, to make the training experience touch on human emotions. The story can be that of the victim of such an incident, or the perpetrator. When emotions precede logic, cognitive functions are potentially heightened and retention is improved.

The most effective distracted-driving programs combine new regulations for cell-phone use with training that carefully avoids overloading the attendees with material and instead focuses on creating a touching and memorable methodology of addressing these risks. The training stresses the three most common types of distractions and prescribes how to address them. It makes the rationale for following this training emotional as well as logical by connecting the three distractions into a triad of precautions that must be remembered separately but always taken together.

The success is not measured by the breadth or depth of knowledge, but by the transfer of usable techniques that instantly become new knowledge and quickly become new habits.



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