Toolbox Talk - Learning from Operating Experience

Todd Jerome Jenkins | v2.0 | October 13, 2026 | 5–10 minutes plus field checks

What and why

Operating experience uses information from actual work, including helpful practices, difficult conditions and events, to ask what applies to today's task. A lesson can reveal a local weakness, but its original solution may not fit our equipment or conditions. Check relevance before adopting it.

Objective: Identify one relevant condition, one important difference and the review needed before using a lesson locally.

When and where

During planning, before similar work and when new information could affect current controls or assumptions. Across industries and work groups. A coordination lesson may transfer even when the original equipment solution does not.

How to use it

- Use an authorized, reliable account with its date and context. Distinguish established findings from open questions and protect private information.
- Compare tasks, hazards, equipment and control conditions. Record similarities, differences and unknowns; a matching job title is not enough.
- Obtain the required local review before a change. Preserve required safeguards, verify approved controls and communicate the decision and limits.

Verify It in the Field

Use a fictional paper lesson about a missed shift restriction. Ask which part could apply locally and what evidence would answer that question.

Add a different equipment model to the example. Success means seeking technical review before copying its solution.

For a real lesson, record the applicability decision and basis. Verify any approved control using its governing criterion, safe method and authorized checker.

Failure points and stop triggers

Copying a fix; dismissing another industry; incomplete accounts; outdated advice; sharing private details. Hold reliance on unreviewed changes, uncertain sources or unverified controls. Keep affected exposure protected while questions are resolved; never recreate an event to test the lesson.

Toolbox talk questions

1. Which condition could also exist here?

2. What difference could make the original solution unsuitable?

3. What evidence will show the local action works?

Use the separate supervisor field check and attendance sheet. Practice is not qualification or work authorization.

Source: DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2, printed pp. 90–92. References and task-specific limits on the webpage.

Next step: Apply this skill to one step on the free JHA/JSA field-verification worksheet.

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/operating-experience-lesson-applicability

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