

Learning Teams: Ask What Makes Work Difficult

Todd Jerome Jenkins | v1.0 | Reviewed October 6, 2026 | Discussion + field checks

Why this matters

The crew may know about a difficult step long before it appears in a report. Ask how the task normally works, what changes and what helps. Use that understanding to choose a useful follow-up and verify any resulting improvement.

Objective: Describe one work difficulty and agree how it will be examined and followed through.

Key hazards or failure points

Leader answers crowding out workers; rushing to a solution; treating different accounts as misconduct; ignored reports; unsafe demonstrations; changes made without review.

Practical controls

- Choose a specific task and invite people who do or support it. Explain the purpose, how notes will be used and how urgent hazards will be handled. Make participation understandable and accessible.
- Ask for the normal sequence before discussing improvement. Explore differences in tools, staffing, conditions and controls. Listen for what helps work succeed as well as what gets in the way.
- Keep learning and solution selection distinct. Arrange a fuller facilitated session when the issue needs it. Use the employer's review process before changing equipment, procedures or protection.

Verify It in the Field

Repeat the crew's description and ask what you missed. Record what is known, what differs between accounts and what needs checking. A nod or unanimous answer is not evidence that the whole job is understood.

If field observation would help, agree a protected viewing position and a safe method. Examine the actual control and its source criteria with the appropriate person. Do not recreate a close call, bypass a safeguard or expose someone to prove a difficulty.

Before closing, name the follow-up owner, next step and feedback date. For an approved improvement, define the check that will show whether it addresses the difficulty without creating another hazard. Return the result to the crew, including what remains unresolved.

Stop and reassess

Pause affected work immediately for an uncontrolled hazard; do not wait for a learning meeting. Pause the conversation if it becomes an accusation or requests an unsafe demonstration. Protect people, address the issue through the proper process and arrange appropriate follow-up.

Ask the crew

1. Walk us through the part of this task that changes most.
2. What helps you manage it, and what makes that harder?
3. What do we need to understand before choosing a change?

Before closing: agree who will follow up and how the crew will hear back.

Sources: OSHA Worker Participation and Hazard Prevention guidance; Todd's Learning Teams article.

Free next step: [JHA/JSA planning & field-verification worksheet](#)

Expanded guidance, references, supervisor check and attendance record accompany this talk.