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Keeping People Safe:
The Human Dynamics of Injury Prevention

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Introduction

Over the last 15 years, my experience has been that most companies have gotten better at emphasizing the importance of safety, raising safety awareness, and improving safety management systems. Despite these efforts, many safety directors report their injury rates have hit a plateau in recent years.

This paper is designed to give safety leaders information they can use to further reduce injuries and improve workplace safety. It addresses five integral components of workplace safety, including Leadership, Safety Management Systems and Conditions, People Factors, Behaviors and Communication as shown in the diagram below. Recommendations for improving these key aspects of safety are based on years of practical experience and empirical research on the human dynamics of safety.

Exhibit 1. These are the five key components of workplace safety.

Safety Leadership

This section addresses the role of safety leadership in improving workplace safety and draws heavily from the field of Industrial Organizational Psychology (IOP). IOP has been extensively used in organizational improvement efforts, including leadership, executive assessment, employee selection, performance management, and training (Williams, 2002a). However, IOP is rarely applied to safety.

For the past century, IOP focused on the selection and placement of individuals in organizational settings (Viteles, 1932). During World War I, IOP researchers developed and administered the Army Alpha and Beta intelligence tests to more than 1.75 million soldiers. This test was used to place enlisted soldiers in specialized areas where their talents could be best used (e.g., officer training school). Also, IOP researchers developed specific, objective criteria for job performance evaluations that were used for the selection and promotion of WWI officers. During World War II, IOP researchers focused on personnel training instead of selection and placement. Situational stress tests were conducted to better prepare soldiers for the intense distress and frustration of combat. This included flight simulator assessments with fighter pilots. Early IOP research also addressed personality traits related to organizational leadership. The Big 5 personality traits (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Lack of Neuroticism) were shown to correlate with successful leadership. Other personality traits such as motivation, honesty, integrity, self-confidence, and intelligence were predictive of effective leadership (Cascio, 1998).

As IOP research evolved, trait theories were criticized because they failed to fully acknowledge the role of the environment in determining leadership performance (and that leadership could be learned to a certain degree). This led to theories on situational leadership (e.g., path-goal theory) which held that leaders' behavior varied as a function of the situation. In this model, people who became effective leaders were better able to optimally maneuver within a wide variety of changing settings (Saal & Knight, 1988). This has also been referred to as high self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974) and the "if-then behavioral signature" (Geller, 2008a). Additional IOP leadership theories include functional leadership (good leaders teach, direct, motivate, and coach employees), transactional leadership (employees perform based on received benefits/punishment), LMX theory (leaders select an "in group" of employees based on similarity and liking), and transformational leadership (leaders use charisma to influence employees) (Lawson & Shen, 1998; Saal & Knight, 1995).

The first and best known IOP classification system for leadership styles comes from French and Raven (1959) who believed the best leaders used a combination of the following five leadership styles.

Legitimate Power

Legitimate Power stems from the recognition by employees that certain people have the appropriate organizational position to lead others (e.g., supervisors). When using legitimate power, good safety leaders exercise authority consistently to increase credibility and promote perceptions of fairness, communicate with employees respectfully, and actively listen to employees' concerns and take corrective action to make improvements.

Reward Power

Reward Power means leaders have the authority and resources to administer valued rewards or to help others obtain desired outcomes. Examples of reward power include managing safety rewards and performance evaluations. One of the most effective (and underused) forms of reward power is sincere, personal praise from a respected leader. If safety rewards are used, they should focus on proactive, process-oriented behaviors and activities instead of outcome numbers (e.g., OSHA and MSHA recordables). They should also be symbolic of safety achievement (e.g., safety shirts, plaques, and certifications) and be unannounced (i.e., not a payoff). Most importantly, traditional, outcome-based safety incentives should not be used because they drive injuries underground.

Coercive Power

Coercive Power represents a leader's authority to impose penalties for non-compliance. Generally, rewards and recognition are more effective than punishment in motivating long-term performance. Excessive use of punishment creates resentment with employees and damages the organization's culture. When coercive power is required, safety leaders should only use punishment for cardinal rule violations like confined space entry infractions or habitual non-compliance, use punishment consistently, stay calm and neutral when applying punishment, always treat employees with respect and dignity, and ensure that other organizational systems don't encourage non-compliance (e.g., excessive production pressure).

Expert Power

Expert Power involves the ability to meet organizational objectives and goals. Technical knowledge and relevant experience, particularly if it is rare in the organization, are components of expert power. Effective leaders exhibit expert power when they promote an image of expertise and credibility, act confidently and decisive in difficult situations, stay informed and current (especially with technical knowledge and safety research), and provide employees leading-edge training.

Charismatic Power

Referent/Charismatic Power involves employees' feelings of respect and liking for the leader. This power base relies primarily on interpersonal relationships, and less on authority, rewards, punishment, or task knowledge. Effective charismatic leaders impart an extreme vision that breaks away from the ordinary; use bold, unconventional techniques to accomplish group goals; make one-on-one appeals to employees to achieve organizational objectives, and communicate with passion and enthusiasm.

In addition to these power bases, it's important to consider leadership behavior. Managers and supervisors may inadvertently encourage at-risk behavior by failing to praise safe behaviors, ignoring at-risk behaviors, over-emphasizing production, and modeling risky behaviors (Geller, 1996b).

Fail to Reinforce a Safe Behavior

Managers and supervisors may fail to praise safe behaviors because they don't notice them, don't want to take time to address them, or because they think it's unwarranted ("That's what they get paid for."). However, praise increases the likelihood employees will continue to operate safely even though it takes longer or is inconvenient. It also makes them feel better about the organization. This praise should be sincere and given when employees go beyond the call of duty for safety.

Fail to Coach an At-Risk Behavior

Managers and supervisors may fail to coach at-risk behavior because they don't want to interfere with production goals or confront employees. They also may consider the risk inconsequential, especially if employees go long periods of time taking risks and not getting hurt. Unfortunately, failure to coach risky behavior implies acceptance and greatly increases the likelihood that employees will take shortcuts and get hurt.

Reinforce Production More than Safety

Managers and Supervisors may reinforce production more than safety because they believe that's what they get paid and promoted for. This minimizes the importance of safety and increases the likelihood of safety shortcuts and injuries.

Model At-Risk Behaviors

Managers and supervisors may model risky behaviors themselves because they're unaware of the risk, they've developed risky habits, or they don't think others will notice or care. When this happens, it sends the message that safety isn't that important and increases the chances employees will take similar risks in the future.

Safety Management Systems and Conditions

One of the most important aspects of safety leadership is providing effective safety management systems and a safe work environment. Employees are more likely to be injured if the organization has safety management system failures such as inadequate manpower, unreasonable production pressure, excessive overtime, faulty equipment, insufficient safety training, unclear safety policies, non-existent safety meetings, poor safety communication, and blame-oriented discipline procedures (Geller & Williams, 2001). Managers improve safety culture by optimizing these key safety management systems:

- Near-Miss Reporting
- Minor Injury Reporting
- Incident Analysis/Discipline
- Rules and Policies
- Safety Training
- Environmental Audits
- Safety Communication
- Employee Involvement

Near-Miss Reporting

Organizations should have a formal process for employees to report near misses (i.e., an unplanned event that did not result in injury but had the potential to do so). For example, an employee at a local soft drink bottling company reported that a large stack of empty pallets nearly fell on him as he walked through the warehouse. The safety director assessed the situation and determined that all empty pallets needed to be stored in a covered outdoor area and set limits on how high pallets could be stacked. By filling out a near-miss form, this employee helped ensure that he and other employees won't be injured by falling pallets in the future.

It's extremely important that near-miss reporting is non-punitive. If employees believe they will be punished for reporting a near-miss they'll quit doing it. In fact, it's a good idea for managers and supervisors to reward employees and work groups (through praise or other small tokens of appreciation) for filling out quality near-miss forms. Unfortunately, only 42% of employees (from our Safety Culture Survey) believe near-misses are consistently reported and investigated at their sites.

Minor Injury Reporting

Employees should also report all minor injuries. Minimizing minor injuries decreases the probability of more serious ones occurring. Reports of minor injuries allow the organization to take steps to minimize the chance of this happening again. More importantly, it minimizes the chance of an employee having a more serious injury in the future.

Similar to near-misses, employees should be encouraged to report minor injuries without fear of punishment (Geller, 1996 a,b). Unfortunately, numerous employees over the years have told me they've been reprimanded or even punished for reporting minor injuries. In these organizations, employees soon learn to hide minor injuries to escape punishment. This is often referred to as the bloody pocket syndrome. In addition to punishment, employees sometimes face excessive paperwork following a minor injury which also drives injuries underground. In fact, only 57% of employees (from our survey) agree, "If I received a minor injury on the job I would report it."

Incident Analysis/Discipline

When an employee is injured on the job, the company will typically conduct an incident analysis to determine what happened and why. This process should be done to correct system factors and hazards contributing to injuries. In rare cases, employees may need to be punished for breaking cardinal rules such as confined space entry infractions.

Unfortunately, employees often view this process as blame oriented, especially when it's done inconsistently and called an accident investigation (Geller, 1996 a,b). In fact, one of the fastest ways to damage employees' performance and attitudes is to punish them inconsistently (Daniels, 1989; Geller, 2008b). It's noteworthy approximately two-thirds of employees from our survey report their company's discipline process is used inconsistently. With incident analyses and discipline processes, it's imperative that managers:

- Establish a clear discipline process
- Effectively explain this process to employees
- Investigate system factors contributing to injuries
- Use punishment sparingly and consistently
- Correct identified system problems

In my experience, far too many companies find a "root cause" (actually there are many) of operator error with the predictable corrective action of re-training during incident analyses (called investigations). Unfortunately, this "investigation" may ignore numerous system factors contributing to the incident. From our survey, more than half of all respondents believe production pressure sometimes trumps safety concerns for both managers and supervisors. When leaders apply unreasonable production pressure, employees are motivated to take safety shortcuts

to save time and stay out of trouble. Excessive overtime, often the result of insufficient manpower, is another major contributor to at-risk behaviors.

Rules and Procedures

Safety rules and procedures are designed to keep employees from getting hurt or killed on the job. They should be consistently enforced to avoid perceptions of favoritism or incompetence. In creating safety rules and standard operating procedures, safety directors are well served to consult with engineers, managers, supervisors, and hourly employees to ensure safety rules are clear, practical, and written in user-friendly language.

Safety Training

Effective safety training engages employees in safety efforts and improves workplace safety (Williams, 2003). Unfortunately, employees often complain that safety training is boring (e.g., "Death by PowerPoint") and repetitive. Effective managers improve safety training by providing hands-on training (e.g., use actual fire extinguishers during fire safety training), bringing in dynamic guest speakers, hiring training consultants for special programs, and ensuring new employees receive all necessary training before working and more experienced employees get periodic refresher training.

Also, webinars are an increasingly cost-effective and convenient way to conduct training. However, these webinars (and computer based training) should supplement and not replace hands-on training, especially with topics such as confined space entry, lock-out/tag-out, fork truck training etc. Finally, hourly employees can provide great credibility when they conduct safety training because fellow employees can easily relate to (and trust) the speaker.

Environmental Audits

Employees should regularly conduct environmental audits (along with safety personnel, managers, and supervisors) to identify safety hazards in the facility. This is particularly important because employees often become complacent to the hazards around them. Most employees I've talked to who've been seriously injured on the job have told me they were doing routine tasks like they'd always done when they got hurt. By their own admission, they got complacent.

Safety audits also help leaders identify and correct safety hazards that can injure and kill people. Fixing identified hazards in a timely fashion prevents injuries and also improves morale. The worst possible response to employees' concerns about safety hazards is a non-response which is interpreted as "the company doesn't care about us." It's important to let employees know when safety hazards will be addressed if they can't be fixed right away. Finally, changes resulting from audits should be advertised to employees so they better understand management's efforts to improve safety.

Safety Communication

Management should effectively convey information about safety improvement efforts to employees. This includes sharing information about recent injuries and near misses. Because managers are held accountable for injury statistics, they sometimes inadvertently overemphasize injury numbers at the expense of demonstrating genuine concern for employees' safety. In fact, most employees (from our survey) believe managers care more about the injury numbers than

employees' actual safety. Managers are well served to remember that safety statistics should be used in conjunction with testimonials and genuine discussions about employees' safety.

Employee Involvement

Increasing employee participation in safety efforts is key to organizational safety improvement (Geller, 2002). The first step in increasing employee involvement for safety is hiring conscientious employees who care about safety. Unfortunately, some managers tell me their companies simply hire "warm bodies" or "anyone who can pass the drug test." Others point out their selection practices are limited to brief interviews and a cursory resume examination.

Organizations with elite employees normally offer competitive salaries and often use an array of selection tools, including cognitive (intelligence) tests, personality tests, biodata instruments, assessment center exercises, vocation tests (when appropriate) and/or structured interviews (Spector, 1996). Structured interviews involve managers asking all prospective employees standardized questions during interviews which are behaviorally anchored and based on prior job analyses (Cascio, 1998). Once employees are in place, innovative safety programs and mentoring can help cultivate and maintain employee involvement in safety. Many of the best programs involve family members and/or community improvement efforts.

People Factors

Seminal social psychological research demonstrates that people experience cognitive dissonance when their attitudes/beliefs and behaviors are incongruent. This unpleasant state motivates them to either change their behaviors or their attitudes so they're consistent (Festinger, 1957). For instance, a manager who considers himself a nice person will feel guilty if he finds himself regularly yelling at employees. This realization (and cognitive dissonance) will motivate him to either stop yelling or change the way he views himself.

With this in mind, employees with positive attitudes for safety are more likely to exhibit positive safety behaviors such as following safety procedures, reporting safety hazards, participating in safety initiatives, cautioning coworkers about safety hazards etc. However, when employees have bad attitudes, they often hide injuries, take shortcuts, resist safety improvement efforts, and quit providing safety feedback to others (Geller, 2005, Geller & Williams, 2001).

Employee attitudes can be classified as Complainers, Spectators, and Champions (adapted from Yanna, 1996) which can change based on interactions with others. So, Complainers can become Champions (and vice-versa). Here's an explanation of each category.

Complainers

Complainers usually voice safety concerns to express displeasure, not to make improvements. Also, they often direct these complaints to other employees instead of safety personnel or supervisors who have the power to make changes. In general, complainers seek out ways to find fault with the organization and other employees. They also believe other people cause their problems, change is inherently bad, and people don't have control over their own lives. This leads to feelings of anger, resentment, doubt, frustration, and fear.

Spectators

Spectators rarely discuss safety concerns, as they believe their actions will have little effect on the company. As a result, they seldom get involved in safety efforts. Spectators typically believe other people will solve important problems, change is unnecessary, most situations are "no big deal," and people have minimal control over their lives. As a result, Spectators often feel uninspired, detached, unemotional, and indifferent.

Champions

Champions normally express safety concerns constructively and work effectively with others to make improvements. They also have a positive outlook toward most employees and the organization as a whole. Champions generally believe problems create opportunities for change, change is a sign of growth, and people control their own lives. They also deal with negative aspects of the company in a reasonable, mature fashion. This leads to feelings of confidence, happiness, contentment, personal control, and optimism.

As mentioned, these attitudes are not set in stone. Effective safety leaders use the following techniques to try and move employees from complainers to champions:

- Own up to past organizational mistakes and look to the future to make improvements.
- Always consider safety when making organizational decisions (e.g., scheduling, manpower).
- Treat employee mistakes as learning opportunities, not occasions to punish.
- Solicit input from employees about safety concerns and respond to these concerns in a timely manner.
- Create opportunities for employees to get involved in safety initiatives.
- Encourage discussions between and within organizational levels.
- Increase the frequency and quality of one-on-one conversations.
- Emphasize safety as much as production and quality, both formally (e.g., meetings) and informally. Hold supervisors accountable for balancing safety and production demands.
- Recognize that a failure to "walk the talk" for safety leads to employee resentment and apathy for safety.
- Focus on proactive safety efforts not just injury outcome statistics.
- Advertise safety improvements and successes.
- Increase personal visibility on the floor to discuss safety (and other) issues with employees.

Clearly, there is no easy formula for turning complainers into champions. As mentioned earlier, fixing equipment concerns quickly and effectively can have a dramatic impact on employees' attitudes. Also, employees' attitudes often get worse following punishment for safety violations (even when the process is fair). This is especially true when the punishment process is unclear, inconsistently applied, or blame oriented.

Finally, complainers may feel isolated if their attitudes aren't shared by most employees. This occurs when the majority of employees believe management is working hard to improve workplace safety. When this happens, employees have better attitudes and are more inclined to get involved for safety. Complainers may feel pressure to either reconsider their current attitudes or at least keep their concerns to themselves. So if an organization is able to build and sustain a healthy culture, the majority of employees will be champions (or at least spectators). If not, four of five complainers may turn into forty or fifty complainers over time.

Behavior

This section addresses the behavioral side of safety. Most injuries are due, in part, to at-risk behaviors which are influenced by system factors. In order to reduce injuries, it's important to understand why employees perform at-risk behaviors.

Behavioral psychologists (especially in the safety field) frequently use the ABC model to explain safe and at-risk behaviors (Geller, 1996 a,b). Basically, Activators (A) or antecedents get our attention to Behave (B) in a certain way. This leads to Consequences (C) which ultimately motivate our behavior. Activators include safety signs, meetings, rules etc. Behaviors (safe or at-risk) are observable actions and include using a safety harness, locking-out power etc. Positive consequences include going home safely and personal pride for safe work practices. Negative consequences include injuries and reprimands for at-risk work practices. Also, consequences are considered strong or weak. Strong consequences are probable, soon, and significant and weak ones are improbable, delayed, and insignificant.

Here's a quick analysis using the ABC model to help explain the at-risk behavior of grinding without a face shield. Activators that encourage face shield use include safety signs, training, and supervisory presence. Activators that discourage face shield use include time pressure, scratched face shields, and a lack of availability.

Consequences that encourage face shield use include not getting an eye injury and not getting in trouble. It is improbable that employees will be injured or get in trouble (unless they get caught) for grinding without a face shield (although these consequences would be soon and significant). Because these consequences are improbable, they lack strength.

On the other hand, consequences that discourage face shield use include saving time, better vision, and more comfort. All of these consequences are probable, soon, and significant. This means they're strong and employees are likely to follow them. So, the natural consequences are stronger for not wearing face shields than for wearing them.

Smoking cigarettes is another example. The positive consequence of smoking (relaxation) is probable, soon, and significant. It's especially significant if the person is anxious or stressed out (activators). However, thousands of people die every year from lung cancer associated with smoking. Obviously, this is an extremely significant consequence. However, it may not seem probable or immediate. For this reason (and because of nicotine), countless people delay or abandon their efforts to quit smoking every day.

In general, the natural consequences of at-risk behavior outweigh those of safe behavior. As a result, people often take safety shortcuts. This is true for numerous safety behaviors such as PPE use, proper lifting, vehicle driving etc. It's especially true when system factors (e.g., excessive production pressure) further support the at-risk behavior.

Behavior Based Safety (BBS)

Because people are naturally inclined to be risky, it's important for employees to serve as their brothers'/sisters' keeper for safety. This includes providing safety feedback to coworkers to

minimize at-risk behaviors. If this doesn't occur, employees are more likely to have safety incidents.

BBS raises safety awareness and encourages employees to provide respectful safety feedback to one another. By observing safety-related behaviors, employees point out risky behaviors that may lead to injury. They also praise and reinforce safe behaviors performed. In addition to one-on-one feedback, group (behavioral) data in the form of graphs and charts are provided to help reduce risky behavioral trends and support safe ones (Geller & Williams, 2001; Krause et. al., 1996; McSween, 1995; Williams & Geller, 2000).

When implementing BBS, it's crucial the process is positive, employee-driven, anonymous, non-punitive, and focused on long term success. In a nutshell, BBS should be implemented as follows:

- Train managers and supervisors on the principles and practical applications of BBS to improve safety culture.
- Put together a steering team to manage the BBS process. Most team members should be hourly employees (including union members in union environments) from different areas and shifts. The team also has (normally) a few safety personnel and supervisors. Most steering teams range from 5 to 15 members.
- Provide comprehensive BBS training to team members. This includes BBS process development (creating a BBS card, determining rules for using the card, defining roles and responsibilities of key groups to make the process successful etc.).
- Members of this team (in house trainers) are taught how to provide BBS training to hourly employees (or outside consultants provide this training). All hourly employees should be trained. Upon completion of this training, formal observations begin. All employees are encouraged to do safety observations.
- Steering team members collect BBS cards, enter observation information into a data base, and analyze the results.
- Monthly BBS data are provided to managers/supervisors/employees through safety meetings, bulletin boards etc. The steering team identifies improvement opportunities and successes from the data.
- Periodically, the BBS process is assessed and adjusted as needed.

Cautions with BBS

It's essential managers, supervisors, steering team members, and hourly employees support BBS to optimize process success. Also, it's extremely important to get early union buy in so employees know the process isn't blame oriented. When done poorly, BBS may be implemented when the organizational culture isn't advanced enough to fully sustain it (Kamp, 2000) or without sufficient integration with other safety management systems (Manuele, 2000; Eckenfelder, 2004).

From my experience, it's very important that BBS is integrated into the broader safety management system. Safety managers should view BBS as one piece of a much larger puzzle to prevent injuries. Also, BBS should be viewed as a long-term, ongoing effort instead of a quick fix or magic bullet. And, as previously mentioned, BBS needs to be positive, employee-driven, and non-punitive.

Communication

One of the most effective ways to influence workplace safety and reduce injuries is to improve safety communication (Williams, 2003). Unfortunately, employees often fail to speak up when they observe coworkers' risky behaviors even though they want to. In fact, more than 90% of respondents (from our survey) believe employees should caution others when they're operating at-risk. And yet, only 60% say that actually do provide this feedback. Ironically, people underestimate others' willingness to receive safety feedback. In fact, 74% of respondents from our survey confirm they welcome peer observations for the purposes of receiving safety feedback. And yet, only 28% believe other employees feel the same way.

Here are some recommendations for providing feedback for risky behaviors:

- Give it one-on-one and right away.
- Be friendly, positive and respectful.
- Focus on the safety behavior and don't make it personal.
- Focus on risk potential, not safety rules.
- Don't lecture the person about safety rules.
- Ask people questions to facilitate discussion.
- Show genuine concern for others' feelings and well being.
- Work together to find better solutions.
- Thank the person for listening.

Here are some considerations for receiving corrective feedback effectively:

- Actively listen.
- Remain open and receptive even if you don't agree with everything the speaker says.
- Accept feedback without getting defensive or harboring resentment.
- Clarify the future desired behavior with the speaker.
- Thank the person for taking the time to give this feedback.

Beyond increasing corrective feedback, it is also important to consider the power of rewarding feedback to increase safe work practices (Geller, 2008b). Praising people for safe work practices increases the probability these work practices will be performed safely in the future and builds a more open and positive safety culture. Unfortunately, safety praise between employees, and from managers or supervisors, rarely occurs in most organizations. In fact, only 28% of employees (from our survey) say they receive regular safety praise from coworkers and only 39% indicate they receive this from supervisors.

Praising people can also be difficult. Employees may believe you're either being insincere (blowing smoke) or have ulterior motives (what do they really want?). Although employees may not need constant praise for everyday safety behaviors (e.g., using hearing protection) most appreciate an occasional thank you for these efforts. They also welcome praise for safety behaviors that go beyond the call of duty, such as cleaning up a spill in a different department after the shift ends. Increasing safety praise makes the organization a safer, more enjoyable place to work.

Here are guidelines for providing praise for safe work practices:

- Give it one-on-one. Public praise can be embarrassing (e.g., the employee is accused of "kissing up")
- Specify the behavior you're praising so the person knows exactly what behaviors you're addressing.
- Be sincere. Insincere praise can be construed as insulting or condescending.
- Do it more often. Increase the amount of positive gossip in the organization.

Broadly speaking, there are a number of causes of poor safety communication, some of which include:

- Lack of information or knowledge
- Not clearly explaining goals and priorities
- Not listening
- Failing to ask questions when something is unclear
- Preconceived ideas/close mindedness
- Jumping to conclusions
- Not understanding others' needs
- Losing patience and allowing discussions to become heated
- Time pressure
- Failure to explore all options
- Poor communication patterns

The final item, poor communication patterns, may be the most challenging communication obstacle to overcome. Our communication patterns are shaped by cultural variables, personality traits and states, environmental conditions and many other factors. Unfortunately, we may learn maladaptive styles of communication that hinder personal and/or organizational effectiveness. For purposes of this paper, communication patterns will be categorized into four categories, including:

- Dominant Style
- Passive Style
- Passive-Aggressive Style
- Empathic Style

This categorization may be a useful heuristic for understanding and improving our communication patterns (Williams, 2006). Using this breakdown, the Empathic style is set up as the optimal style of communication. The other three styles are considered ineffective (in most situations). Common beliefs, behaviors, and effects on others are shown for each communication style.

Dominant Communication Style

The Dominant communication style is characterized by overbearing, inconsiderate verbal behavior. Common beliefs of the Dominant communicator include: "Others should think the way I do," "I am seldom if ever wrong," "My opinions supersede yours," and "People who disagree with me are either disloyal or misinformed." These beliefs often lead to the following negative behavioral tendencies:

- Publicly criticizes others (e.g., “You know you’re supposed wear a hard hat. The rest of us are.”)
- Blames others when problems arise.
- Tends to act bossy and negative.
- Frequently bullies others. (e.g., “I told you to quit speeding on that fork truck! I’m not going to tell you again!”)
- Uses verbally aggressive and threatening language.
- Fails to show appreciation for others’ accomplishments.
- Frequently interrupts others and finishes others’ sentences.
- Dismisses new ideas without hearing the rationale first.

The negative effects that the Dominant communicator has on others include:

- Provoking fear, counter-control, and alienation.
- Fostering resistance, defiance, sabotaging, striking back, forming alliances, lying, and covering-up behaviors.
- Damaging corporate culture and morale.
- Hindering optimal organizational performance.

Passive Communication Style

The Passive communication style is also ineffective and is characterized by meek, indirect verbal behavior. Common beliefs of the Passive communicator include: “Don't express your true feelings,” “Don't make waves,” “Don't disagree with others,” and “Others’ opinions are more important than mine.” These beliefs often lead to the following negative behavioral tendencies:

- Typically remains quiet, even when being treated unfairly.
- Asks permission unnecessarily.
- Frequently complains instead of taking action. (e.g., “They never give us time to do these safety audits.”)
- Allows others to make choices for them when it is unnecessary.
- Spends too much time avoiding conflict.
- Tends to be overly self-critical.
- Tends to be overly agreeable. No real point of view is expressed.

The negative effects that the Passive communicator has on others include:

- Others “don’t know where they stand” with the passive communicator. This leads to frustration and mistrust.
- Decreased leadership credibility because the passive communicator is seen as weak and ineffective.
- Decreased communication. People may become overly concerned with how comments are perceived or interpreted.

Passive-Aggressive Communication Style

The Passive-Aggressive communication style is also ineffective and is characterized by sarcastic, gossipy behavior. Common beliefs of the Passive-Aggressive communicator include: “When you have an issue with someone, go behind their backs to deal with it,” “Get back at others if they cross you, even if it takes a while,” and “Build coalitions against others instead of dealing with

people directly and honestly." These beliefs often lead to the following negative behavioral tendencies:

- Appears to agree with others when they really don't.
- Expresses concerns about an individual to other people instead of that individual him/herself. (e.g., "That new guy never wears his PPE.")
- Makes sarcastic remarks and takes subtle digs at others.
- May send harsh messages via email and copy others on those emails.
- Holds grudges and values "getting even."
- Sabotages people behind their backs.
- Withholds assistance to others.
- May give others "the silent treatment."
- Criticizes after the fact.

The negative effects that the Passive-Aggressive communicator has on others include:

- Increased factions, favoritism, and "back-stabbing."
- Increased gossip.
- Low interpersonal trust.
- Diminished job performance.
- Increased uncertainty and job dissatisfaction leading to low morale on the job and at home.

Empathic Communication Style

The Empathic communication style is characterized by compassionate, concerned, and considerate verbal behavior. Common beliefs of the Empathic communicator include: "Personal opinions and the opinions of others are important," "The process of coming to a decision (not just the decision itself) is important," and "Getting input from others boosts morale and generally leads to better decision making." These beliefs often lead to the following positive, pro-social behavioral tendencies:

- Communicates using choices instead of demands.
- Tends to be proactive, assertive, and action-oriented.
- Tends to be realistic in expectations.
- Communicates in a direct, honest manner. (e.g., "I really appreciate the way you're setting a good example for safety in our area.")
- Works to achieve goals without compromising others.

The positive effects that the Empathic communicator has on others include:

- Increased motivation to achieve and "go beyond the call of duty" for the organization.
- Improved sense of appreciation and respect.
- Increased levels of trust, respect, honesty, and openness.
- Enhanced organizational culture, morale, and performance.

There are various techniques than can be used to improve empathic communication skills. Empathic communicators are assertive, confident, and action-oriented and they express opinions directly and honestly. This allows others to "know where they stand" with the person. Empathic

communicators also show respect for others' opinions, listen carefully to others, and thank others for their input. This sensitivity to others' feelings/concerns is also demonstrated by:

- Soliciting opinions and ideas from others when making decisions.
- Choosing not to ignore or verbally attack others with different opinions.
- Inviting others to join conversations, especially in meetings.
- Reaching out to people being excluded from conversation (e.g., when an idea is dropped without acknowledgement, bring the idea up again to discuss and reach closure.)
- Confronting problems as soon as they occur and addressing the person directly instead of talking to others about the issue.

Empathic communicators also build trust by appropriately disclosing information about themselves, asking how others are doing, and spending more time visiting with others informally. They also consistently speak positively and constructively with others and don't let negative feelings with others build up. Finally, Empathic communicators are equally good at receiving corrective feedback for safety. When others provide them feedback about at-risk behaviors, Empathic communicators remain open and receptive, avoid getting defensive, accept feedback without resentment or retaliation, and often thank the person for providing feedback.

Conclusion

Elite organizations take a comprehensive approach to safety improvement. This includes addressing five integral components of workplace safety, including Leadership, Safety Management Systems and Conditions, People-Factors, Behaviors and Communication. Effectively addressing each of these components increases the likelihood of preventing workplace injuries and fatalities.

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