

Improving Safety Culture, Behavior, and Management Practices To Prevent Injuries

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Introduction

This presentation gives safety leaders practical information needed to improve safety culture and prevent injuries. It specifically addresses ways to improve safety systems (e.g., training, incident analysis), management practices, safety behaviors, attitudes, and communication.

Safety Systems

In addition to information about the importance of safe work conditions (and fixing equipment problems immediately), improvement recommendations for these safety management systems will be provided:

Near Miss Reporting	Incident Analysis	Safety Training	Communication
Minor Injury Reporting	Safety Rules	Hazard Recognition	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). 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 300,000 responses on 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. However, 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. 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 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

Two system factors in particular contribute to numerous injuries: unreasonable production pressure and excessive overtime. 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. Excessive overtime and production pressure are hidden factors contributing to many workplace injuries across the country.

Safety Rules

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. Unfortunately, employees often complain that safety training is boring 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, forklift 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. Here are some

safety training guidelines to consider, especially for new trainers and/or inexperienced hourly employees.

1. *Know the Content and Get Organized*
Nothing instills fear in trainers more than not fully understanding the materials. Employees are well served to over-prepare and practice delivering the materials (and getting feedback) before doing the actual training.
2. *Provide Personal Stories and Testimonials*
Stories and testimonials make the training personal and help participants better relate to the materials and presenter. Testimonials with injuries and near misses drive home the purpose of the safety training.
3. *Be Honest and Sincere*
Employees speaking from the heart gain credibility and appreciation from participants. Trainers should regularly relate their own experiences and avoid reading bulleted items slide after slide (i.e., Death by PowerPoint).
4. *Don't Dwell on Mistakes*
Trainers should move forward following minor mistakes (e.g., repeating a bulleted item) especially since training participants often don't notice the mistakes anyway. Also, if trainers don't know the answer to a question, they should tell the person they'll find out as soon as possible and get back to them instead of pretending to know the answer.
5. *Relax and Slow Down*
When trainers are nervous, they often speak extremely fast. This decreases training effectiveness and disrupts the training schedule. Asking open-ended questions to audience members often affords the trainer a chance to relax and slow down.
6. *Ask Questions to Facilitate Discussion*
Asking open-ended questions is also a great way to make the training more interactive and employees appreciate the opportunity to share their own opinions.
7. *Use Group Exercises*
Trainers should have group exercises built in to their training presentations. These exercises facilitate group discussions that help employees better learn the materials and also makes the workshops more fun.
8. *Manage Time Appropriately*
Trainers need to start and stop on time as well as provide sufficient time for breaks (at least one break every 90 minutes). Never go past the allotted time for training.
9. *Get Feedback*
Feedback evaluation forms are helpful in letting trainers understand how participants are reacting to the training. Feedback forms should encourage participants to list strengths, weaknesses, and improvement ideas for the training session.
10. *Manage Logistics*
Trainers need to ensure the following items are in order: computer, LCD projector, handouts, flip charts (with markers, pens and tape), and (most importantly) food and refreshments.

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 help raise employees' awareness of safety hazards in the environment. They also help leaders identify and correct safety hazards that can injure and kill people. Fixing identified hazards in a timely fashion improves morale as well as the safety of the work environment. It's important to let employees know when safety hazards will be addressed if they can't be fixed right away. Also, alternative fixes should be provided when employee concerns can't be addressed. The worst possible response to employees' concerns about safety hazards is a non-response that is interpreted as "the company doesn't care about us."

Employee Involvement

Increasing employee participation in safety efforts is key to organizational safety improvement. 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. Structured interviews involve managers asking all prospective employees standardized questions during interviews which are behaviorally anchored and based on prior job analyses. Once employees are in place, innovative safety programs and mentoring can help cultivate and maintain employee involvement in safety.

Incentives

Managers sometimes misuse outcome-based incentives to demonstrate their support for safety. This may lead to decreased morale and employee involvement for safety. With typical outcome-based safety incentives, employees who go a certain amount of time without a recordable injury get a monetary reward. An unintended consequence (presumably) of this approach is that employees hide injuries and may pressure others to do so to get the reward.

If incentives are used for safety, they should be process oriented and achievable (Geller, 2001). The incentives themselves should be small tokens of appreciation that have a safety theme, such as giving out fire extinguishers and first aid kits. Most importantly, sincere and legitimate praise should be the default reward that managers use with employees to improve employee involvement in safety.

Leadership

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, 2001, Williams, 2002).

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.

Attitudes

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 & Williams, 2001).

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

- *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* 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* 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.

Tips for trying to move employees from complainers to champions will be provided.

Behavior

The contributing role of at-risk behaviors to injuries and fatalities will be addressed. Specifically, the role of Behavior Based Safety (BBS) to increase employee engagement for safety and reduce injuries is discussed. In general, the natural consequences of at-risk behavior outweigh those of safe behavior (e.g., easier, faster, more comfortable). 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.

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 encourages peers to respectfully provide 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).

Communication

Here are four types of communication patterns which impact safety: Dominant, Passive, Passive-Aggressive, and Empathic (adapted from Brounstein, 2001). The first three styles are ineffective and damage workplace safety. However, empathic communication is ideal and improves safety culture (Williams, 2006).

The Dominant Communicator

Dominant communicators tend to run people over in interpersonal conversations (Brounstein, 2001). They usually think they're never wrong, their opinions are more important than others, and people who disagree with them are either disloyal or misinformed. These misguided beliefs often lead to these maladaptive behaviors:

- Criticizing others in public.
- Blaming others when problems arise.
- Acting bossy and negative.
- Bullying others with verbally aggressive and threatening language.
- Failing to show appreciation for others' accomplishments.
- Frequently interrupting others and dismissing new ideas.

Dominant communicators:

- Provoke fear, alienation, defiance, and covering-up behaviors.
- Damage corporate culture and morale.
- Hinder optimal organizational (safety) performance.

The Passive Communicator

Passive communicators lose employees' respect by being overly indirect and meek with interpersonal communication (Williams, 2006). Passive communicators believe you shouldn't

express your true feelings, make waves, or disagree with others. They may also think other people's opinions are more important than their own. These beliefs often lead to these maladaptive behaviors:

- Remaining quiet even when being treated unfairly.
 - Asking permission unnecessarily.
 - Complaining to others instead of taking action.
 - Allowing others to make choices for them when it's unnecessary.
 - Spending too much time avoiding conflict.
 - Becoming overly agreeable and self-critical.
- Passive communicators have the following effects on others:
- Employees don't know where they stand with the passive communicator. This leads to frustration and mistrust.
 - Leadership credibility is undermined because the passive communicator is seen as weak and ineffective.
 - Open communication is hindered because employees become overly concerned with how comments are perceived or interpreted (i.e., walking on eggshells).

The Passive-Aggressive Communicator

Passive-Aggressive communicators believe you should go behind people's backs to address issues instead of dealing with people directly (Brounstein, 2001). They also:

- Appear to agree with others when they really don't.
- Make sarcastic remarks and take subtle digs at others.
- Send harsh messages (and blind copy others) via email.
- Hold grudges and value getting even.
- Sabotage people behind their backs.
- Withhold assistance to others.
- Give others the silent treatment.
- Criticize after the fact.

Passive-Aggressive communicators have the following effects on others:

- Increased factions, favoritism, and backstabbing.
- Increased gossip.
- Low interpersonal trust.
- Diminished job performance
- Increased uncertainty and job dissatisfaction.
- Increased turnover.

The Empathic Communicator

Unlike the previous three styles, Empathic communicators effectively interact with others to maintain healthy long-term relationships (Williams, 2006). Companies with numerous Empathic communicators will have better safety cultures. Empathic communicators believe:

- Personal opinions and the opinions of others are important.

- The process of coming to a decision, not just the decision itself, is important.
- Getting input from others boosts morale and generally leads to better decision making.

These beliefs often translate to these positive behaviors:

- Communicating in a direct, honest manner.
- Communicating using choices instead of demands.
- Acting in a proactive, assertive, and action-oriented manner.
- Maintaining realistic expectations.
- Achieving goals without compromising others.

Empathic communicators have the following effects on others:

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

Ten Key Guidelines to Become an Empathic Communicator

Here are fundamental communication guidelines to become a more Empathic communicator (Williams, 2006):

1. Be assertive, confident, and action oriented.
2. Express opinions directly and honestly.
3. Show respect for others' opinions.
 - a. Listen carefully. Thank others for their input.
 - b. Solicit opinions and ideas from others when making decisions.
 - c. Don't ignore or verbally attack others with different opinions.
 - d. Communicate with choices instead of demands.
4. Invite others to join conversations, especially in meetings.
 - a. Reach out to people being excluded from conversation.
 - b. When an idea is dropped without acknowledgement, bring the idea up again to discuss and reach closure.
5. Confront problems as soon as they occur.
 - a. Address the person directly.
 - b. Don't let negative feelings build up.
6. Share information about yourself.
 - a. Sincere disclosures engender trust and liking.
 - b. Ensure self-disclosures are appropriate and professional.
7. Ask others about themselves and how they're doing.
 - a. Spend more time getting to know others.
 - b. Caring about others increases trust, liking, respect and morale.
8. Use stories when appropriate to convey positions or establish rapport.
9. Speak constructively and positively. Don't negatively gossip about others. Spread positive gossip.
10. Request feedback after sharing ideas and opinions.

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