

Employee Maintenance – Onsite Service Creating a “Fit for Duty” Workforce

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Introduction

Mike Tuck knew he was in for a challenge when he was appointed Plant Manager of Kimberly-Clark Professional (KCP) in Belmont, Michigan. The Kimberly-Clark veteran was tasked by leadership with turning around its recent acquisition, Jackson Safety. The safety supply manufacturer had a 30-year history of 9 to 15 injuries per year and the facility did not fit into Kimberly-Clark’s worldwide safety culture.

The Kimberly-Clark Professional Belmont facility in Grand Rapids, Mich., was acquired through the 2009 acquisition of Jackson Safety. When Kimberly-Clark Professional assumed operations, the facility accounted for 40 percent of the sector’s injuries while employing only 11 percent of its sector’s employees. Averaging an injury a month, the facility was statistically at high risk for a serious injury. All injuries were repetitive and overuse in nature. The root cause of these injuries was that employees were not physically prepared to perform the essential functions of their jobs due to lack of conditioning.

“I can see how that permeated the organization because it was very prevalent, that injuries over a 30-year history, of having nine to fifteen injuries per year over thirty years, you (employees) just begin to believe that is the way things happen,” reflects Tuck on the culture he observed when arriving at the Belmont facility. He chose Todd Hoogewind, former Jackson Safety Plant Manager and current Belmont Safety Leader, to assist him in shifting the safety culture to Kimberly-Clark standards. Hoogewind understood that if pain was not addressed early it could lead to more serious risks of injury.

Ergonomic-Related Injuries Quite Common & Costly

In an article in the *NIOSH Science Blog*, Drs. Brian D. Lowe PhD, Brent A. Baker PhD, and Jim Grosch PhD offer insights into how companies can prevent and manage joint pain in the workplace.

As humans age, there is a natural degeneration of the organism that occurs including the loss of muscle and joint function. The authors state, “Aging is associated with loss of muscle mass and muscle function. Functional loss is influenced by changes at the cellular and

molecular physiology level. These changes may reduce joint stability and impair normal joint motion that affect the ability to tolerate specific work postures and repetitive motion. With a loss in muscle strength, the same level of physical effort places a greater demand on an individual relative to her/his capabilities.”

While we have not yet found a way to halt the aging process, studies show that we can minimize the negative impact of aging through effective intervention. Most company leaders are aware of this fact and have implemented health and wellness programs to promote the health of their workers. Weight management, anti-inflammatory diets, and optimal hydration are some of the ways companies can use to reduce joint pain the workplace.

A new Gallup poll estimates that unhealthy workers cost businesses \$153 billion a year in lost productivity. Nearly 110,000 full-time employees were surveyed, self-reporting their height, weight and chronic medical conditions.

- According to the poll, only about one in seven employees -- 13.9 percent of the workforce -- is of normal weight with no chronic condition, logging an average of just .34 unhealthy days per month, or 4 sick days per year. Those who were overweight or obese but who had no chronic conditions reported an average .36 unhealthy days per month.
- But the more than 30 percent of the population who reported being overweight or obese with one to two chronic conditions missed an average of 1.08 days per month due to poor health, adding up to over \$32 billion in lost productivity.
- Those who said they were overweight or obese with three or more chronic conditions recorded over 3 unhealthy days per month, averaging 42 days per year and totaling \$81 billion in losses¹.

Additionally, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), musculoskeletal disorders accounted for 28.8 percent of all nonfatal, lost-time occupational injury and illness cases in 2010, a four percent increase over the previous year.

Lost-time injuries related to sprains, strains, and tears accounted for 40 percent of the total cases while back injuries resulted in 11 percent of the cases. Overexertion played a role in 43 percent of these injuries, according to the BLS. The body parts that were reported to be most commonly injured were the back (36%), the shoulder (12%), and lower extremities such as groin, knees and ankles (26%).

The BLS also reports that the median lost-time for all injuries is 8 days whereas median lost-time away for MSDs is 11 days – 3 days above the average. Shoulder injuries average 21 days away while carpal tunnel syndrome rivals fractures for days away at 27 and 28 days respectively.

The Turning Point

In June of 2011, Kimberly-Clark Belmont suffered another repetitive and overuse injury. Mike Tuck, the mill manager during this time and now the marketing platform leader, Kimberly-Clark Global Safety, realized that they had to change the beliefs of the organization from “accidents happen” to a new culture that refused to accept accidents.

“We had to change,” Tuck says, “and it was explained that we could not achieve the result of being injury-free without each and every one of us engaging in and taking accountability for our own safety and our co-workers’ safety.” That was the turning point for the Belmont facility. Tuck started the facility down a new path to create a new culture. They started the practice of addressing pain before the pain escalates into a workplace claim!

Seven Steps to Shift the Safety Culture

1. Make health and safety as important as production and quality.

Tuck states, “We really believe, and we have experienced that (when) focusing on safety as a value, all those other things come as well. In our experience, the facilities that have the best safety records also have the best productivity, quality, and cost. Those things come hand in hand.” Hoogewind agrees, “There’s a weekly production meeting and we present safety. All of our meetings start out with safety.”

2. Take advantage of pivotal moments.

Tuck was in the middle of a safety strategy session with his team about the poor results they were having when a supervisor came to the door with a report of another injury. Tuck remembers, “That was the point where I made the call that we are going to shut the plant down today and have some discussion with these folks. He assembled the workers and told them, “We can’t continue to accept this is an outcome of making products with Kimberly-Clark in Belmont, Michigan. This is just unacceptable. Statistics tell us that we are at high risk for a serious injury up to and including a death in this facility and that’s just not something I’m going to live with.”

3. Give a resounding ‘why’ for the need to change.

To implement a culture change, you need a strong **why**, something that employees can relate to and see a benefit. For Tuck, it was the fact that the facility was an unsafe safety supply company, “I was quickly able to leverage the fact that we made safety products and this could be a **resounding why behind why we needed to change**. So it was really kind of a platform to speak from. (How) can we have customers in here to visit our facility and try to sell them more protective equipment when we are not safe ourselves.”

4. Foster employee engagement.

When Tuck and Hoogewind began their safety transformation in 2010, they asked for volunteers for the safety committee from the 260-person workforce. They received four volunteers. Tuck explains, “That was the day that I asked for volunteers to help me with that (safety) and four of the 260 employees said they would help. When we did the sign up in January (2012) of this year there was over 55 applicants out of 240 employees. The four original are now key senior members of the safety committee and they are actual individual leaders within teams on the safety committee.”

5. Consistent leadership.

Changing a culture is a difficult process that requires consistent leadership especially when things do not go smoothly. Hoogewind explains, “We had our spurts, we would go three or four months without an injury and then we would have one. It’s never a smooth path, so we really put a lot of emphasis around the culture and taking the time.”

Tuck never wavered off his goal, “We started talking about the future and what success looked like. From a leadership perspective, I was very consistent in that because people need to understand why we firmly establish safety as a value and had consistent employee communications regarding the fact that ‘we make safety products and we won’t accept getting injured for any business goal’. What a great place to work it will be here in

Belmont when we are injury-free and our customers and colleagues will be coming to Belmont to understand how we achieved our goal.”

6. Relentless risk reduction: Get to the root causes of workplace injuries and find a solution.

Tuck soon learned that most of the injuries at the Belmont facility were ergonomic in nature and that repetitive strain injuries are some of the most difficult to prevent and correct. Hoogewind agrees, “In 2011, our first injury was somebody cut themselves. The other three after that were ergonomic and ergonomics are not easy to fix.”

7. Onsite “Employee Maintenance Center”

To help meet the objective of addressing pain early, Mike Tuck implemented the “Employee Maintenance Center” onsite at the Belmont Facility on July 11th 2012. Since that day, the Kimberly-Clark Belmont facility has been **Injury-Free!**

Resistance exercise has been shown to improve muscle and joint function but it is difficult to engage employees in a physical fitness regimen whether due to time constraints or other reasons real or perceived. Physical therapy is another option that gets excellent results but long-term injuries can get quite expensive and is reactive rather than proactive.

The answer to getting workers to engage in a strength and conditioning program so that they are physically able to do their jobs and, to have them do it voluntarily, is to 1) combine a biophysical profile of workers with quantitative ergonomic assessments to identify problem areas, 2) implement an on-site treatment of worker MSD to reduce and eliminate workplace pain, and 3) follow up with an on-site program to maintain and improve worker strength and flexibility going forward.

The Employee Maintenance Center has a three phase process: **care, maintain and prevent**. The program is designed to **care** for employees already in pain with services that improve physical strength, flexibility and endurance while reducing and often eliminating pain. Next is **maintain**, here the Employee Maintenance Center staff will help employees maintain their desired strength, flexibility and endurance that is necessary to perform ones job task and that is needed to handle many of life’s other challenges. Last is **prevent**, this is the final process where employees take over the responsibility of their own health and are engaged in preventing injuries and diseases.

The integration of the Employee Maintenance Center “**Fit for Duty**” programs provided Kimberly-Clark Belmont workers with services and equipment that improve the physical ability of: back, neck, shoulders, hands, wrists and ankles. All services are provided during and after shift times. The Employee Maintenance Center utilizes specialized equipment to measure participant’s strength, flexibility, endurance and pain tolerance. These scores are compiled to create a risk score that is shared with each participant so their progress can be tracked over time. Only aggregated group information is shared with the employer, no individual participant’s data is shared.

When you stop to think about it, companies spend money to maintain their equipment and facilities, why not maintain their employees?

Conclusion

In July 2012, the Belmont facility celebrated their one-year anniversary of being injury free (currently approaching 600 days). They focused their team's effort on first identifying safety hazards throughout the facility tallying up approximately 1,500 hazards that required a solution. To date they have resolved nearly 3,000 hazards as Hoogewind relates, "we had over 3,000 open hazards that had been entered, today I just looked and we have 28 hazards that have been identified that are still open." Secondly, because many of the injuries to employees were ergonomic in nature, Tuck and Hoogewind actively searched for a solution to their worker's aches, pains, and injuries.

By addressing pain before it becomes a claim, there is less cost and less impact on both the employee and the employer's bottom line. Today, many more workers are physically unhealthy. An onsite Employee Maintenance Center is designed to maintain employee health and conditioning by providing 10-minute sessions onsite that reduce and/or eliminate PAIN so workers can improve their physical strength, flexibility and endurance.

In 10 minutes sessions the Employee Maintenance Center staff can reduce the risk of workplace injury while improving the productivity of the worker. Todd Hoogewind said it best, "I no longer have to listen to co-workers complain about their pain. Our workers today understand what they can do to eliminate their pain and why it is important for them to keep their bodies strong and health. The Employee Maintenance Center has changed our culture and improved the productivity and morale at our site."

Today, we have an onsite solution for ergonomic risk and we are now INJURY-FREE!

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