

6½ Simple Tools to Prove Value, Gain Cooperation, and Save Lives

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Introduction

“Forty-five minutes!” my wife said to me. “Forty-five minutes, Rodney! Only forty-five minutes to get organized and get out the door to get the kids to school on time!” Forty-five minutes for me to get ready in the morning is an *eternity*. I’m bald. I don’t have to wash my hair. I don’t have to blow dry it. So I stick my head back down into the sports page of the morning newspaper. After what I think has only been a few minutes, I look up to see thirty minutes have gone by. I now have fifteen minutes to get myself organized, get my kids dressed, get lunches packed, and to get them to school on time.

We rush out the door. We climb into our car and everyone buckles up seat belts. I look around and back safely out the driveway. I shift into drive and pull down the street. Using my turn signal each time, I make a couple of right turns and get on the freeway. Now that I am on the freeway, I am making up that time that I spent reading the newspaper. I am going a little, okay, I am going a lot faster than the posted speed limit. My eyes glance at the rear view mirror to see a car with flashing lights. So, of course, the first thing I do is turn down my radio (because that is what you do when you see a police car in your rear view mirror, I am not sure why). I turn on my turn signal and slow down. I safely look and move over one lane, I look and move over another lane, and then finally, I pull to the side of the road and stop the car. The safety professional driving the car with the flashing lights comes up and has a short chat with me. He gives me a notice of violation and offers me an invitation to attend safety refresher training. Once we finish, I shift the car back into gear and pull away. I look at my wife who is now looking back at me as only a wife can, and I try not to wince as she says “Rodney, remind me of something. You make a living talking to people about . . . SAFETY?”

But how many of you occasionally drive a little faster than the posted speed limit? We often drive down those freeways and we notice our employees are driving in the car next to us. We wave, “Hey, How you doing?” as we are driving along at 75-80 miles per hour. But when we get to our place of business, we get out of our car, walk in through those doors and we hand them a binder, sometimes multiple binders, of safety policies and procedures and say, “Now that you are here,

now that you have walked through that door, *change your behavior*. Act differently here than you and I were both just acting out there.” The rules are out there. Aren’t they? Those white signs with black numbers on the side of the road. They are clearly posted. The rules are out there and yet we make decisions based on several factors as to whether or not those particular rules apply to us at any given time.

When it comes to business, we are not going to get to the top, no matter what industry we are in, by exposing ourselves to additional liabilities; by getting bogged down in policies, procedures, and checklists; or by trying to drill the rules and regulations into our employees’ heads. We need to get our employees to see safety in a new light. To think differently about workplace safety. To *integrate* safety into their daily activities and make it part of our success. The following 6 ½ simple tools to prove value, gain cooperation and save lives are going to help you defend your profits and protect your people.

Know the Real Cost of Safety

Companies usually treat their Workers’ Compensation Insurance costs like all other insurance costs: consolidated at the highest level of the organization. Most companies total Workers’ Compensation premiums and projected claim payments, divide the total by total payroll, and determine a rate per dollar of payroll that is pushed down to the operating level. This simple method reduces management costs, and each operating group pays its fair share of overall costs based on the total payroll dollars. Unfortunately, there is nothing “fair” about this method. It does not push the “pain” (the direct costs) back to the operating group or manager with the problem in the first place. Therefore, the manager is neither accountable nor responsible for safety failures.

In fact, managing Workers’ Compensation costs in this manner may actually contribute to an unsafe culture. Compare two managers running similar operating locations for the same company. A compensation plan provides each manager with a substantial year-end bonus for his group’s profitability. One manager, Greg, cuts corners, takes undue risks, and tells his employees to get the job done regardless of safety. He considers safety meetings a ‘waste of time’, and training is only conducted when convenient. His group has several injuries over the year, but in the end, the bottom line is in the black. The other manager, John, is a true leader, building relationships with his employees and creating a workplace environment that promotes a balance of productivity, safety, and quality. Due to his efforts, his group has no injuries and the bottom line is also in the black, although to a lesser degree than his colleague’s. Both managers receive bonuses based on the bottom line. Greg’s larger bonus in effect rewards his poor safety leadership. However, because of his behavior, the new fiscal year brings higher Workers’ Compensation costs due to increased premiums and claims paid. Recognizing the potential effects on next year’s bonus, Greg continues cutting corners, maybe taking even greater risks. John, on the other hand, is being punished for creating a safe workplace. His positive safety efforts came off his bottom line and directly reduced his bonus. Now, he must also carry the additional burden created by another manager’s short sightedness. What will he do next year?

Direct safety costs should be pushed down as far as the accounting system will allow. If your company works on a project basis, any direct costs should come from the bottom line of that project. Pushing down safety costs reveals the true profitability of an operating group or individual project and gives a solid base for accurate business decisions. Pushing down safety

costs also forces each supervisor to carry the costs of his/her day-to-day decisions. This accountability creates a sense of responsibility at the frontline management level that will, in turn, create a work environment balancing productivity, safety, and quality, and benefits your entire company, your clients, and your employees.

Reinvent Your Training

How many of your employees love to go to safety training? Let's face it; the topic is dry, often repetitive, and frequently not applicable to the job function of all of the employees in the room. If our training is going to be effective and bring value to the organization, we will need to do a better job of reinventing the training effort. There are three steps to this process: integrate the content, target the audience, and sell the value.

Integrate the Content

Our goal is to create an environment where safety is an equal partner in the overall success of the business. That means an environment that balances productivity, safety and quality. Currently, most organizations provide employee task training, and then safety training comes as a separate offering, conducted by the Safety Coordinator. The regulations have driven this separation by spelling out specific training requirements necessary for each regulation. To meet these requirements, we end up with courses or modules that cover hazard communication, respiratory protection, lockout/tagout (LOTO), etc. The more we can successfully integrate these topics into the job-specific or task-specific training, the more likely the employee will understand and retain the information. By integrating the training, we send a strong message that safety is an integral part of successfully completing the job.

Target the Audience

When we conduct training, we must compete for the attention of the participants. If we lose that attention, we lose the value of the session since the employee does not get the information they need to successfully do their job. If our content is not applicable to an employee's job function, they will tune out not only for that particular segment, but we may lose their attention for the remainder of the session. It is much easier and quicker to prepare and deliver a one-size-fits-all or "canned" program. And if the goal is to establish a level of compliance, it is the best way to go. Targeted training, on the other hand, is more difficult and takes more time. And, it is more likely to convey critical information and sustain employee attention. Computer-based training, particularly for those elements that require an annual refresher, can be designed in modules to assist in targeting. However, the personal interaction of the employee and the instructor creates a better opportunity to discuss questions and ensure comprehension. Since the safety elements are integrated in the task training, the supervisor is the best person to provide the instruction.

Sell the Value

Why is it that safety training is perceived so negatively? Employees don't want to attend safety training because we have created a culture that makes it at best a nuisance, and at worst, a punishment. No matter how much work the Safety Manager does to create effective and efficient training, if the front-line supervisor does not "sell" the training to his or her employees, it just becomes another roadblock to production. Have you ever heard someone say, "Just get that safety

training out of the way, I really need you back on the floor?” If our supervisors do not understand the importance and impact of their own communication, they can not help you sell the value.

As mentioned in the introduction, the police officer offered me the opportunity to attend traffic school, or as I like to call it, safety refresher training. Unfortunately, I have had the opportunity to attend traffic school and it was not a pleasant experience. The day was spent on information I already knew, but was choosing to ignore when I got my ticket. They certainly did not teach me that the number on my speedometer must not exceed the black numbers on the white signs on the side of the road. Therefore, to me, the day was just another form of punishment for my speeding. If we look at the work environment, an employee makes a decision that results in an incident. If the employee knew the proper procedures and could physically complete the task safely, then the cause is not a lack of training. In such a case, training is not a corrective action and will not prevent recurrence. Rather, it is simply seen as another form of punishment. If an organization frequently uses safety retraining as punishment, then all safety training becomes punishment in the eyes and minds of the employees.

Ban the Safety Meeting

Safety glasses, safety shoes, safety hats, safety meetings, safety training, and safety incentive programs: each item is commonly found in an industrial or manufacturing work environment. However, I have never come across an organization that calls other tools of success productivity hammers, productivity wrenches, productivity training, or even productivity meetings. By putting the word ‘safety’ in front of the tools deemed to part of the safety process, we unknowingly place them into a separate category; an often optional category. This qualifier puts these extremely important elements of success in a separate box. A box only to be brought out when things go wrong or someone gets hurt. Even the job titles of Safety Manager or Safety Coordinator take these individuals out of the business discussion unless there is a ‘safety problem’. This same effect can be seen when dealing with quality issues. Therefore, we need to *ban the safety meeting*. Now, I am certainly not advising your organization to stop talking about workplace safety. However, if our goal is to integrate safety as just another part of doing business, no more and no less, then we must talk about safety at the same time, at the same place, in the same context, and led by the same person that talks about productivity and quality. To create the balance, these conversations need to be lead by the person who has the most influence on the day-to-day behavior of the workforce: the supervisor.

Reward the Behavior

What do you do when an ant zigzags across your path? You might ignore it or squash it. If you consider, however, that ants don’t live alone and don’t travel far from their hill, you will realize that although you saw only one ant, it’s not the only one around. If you found one today, you will probably find more tomorrow. You can ignore them or squash them one-by-one as they come along. Unless you eliminate the anthill, however, the whole colony will eventually invade your dwelling.

Unsafe behaviors are like ants and most organizations have several flourishing anthills. You can't tackle them all at once. Instead, address only one unsafe behavior at a time. To choose a behavior, use the "SOAR" criteria. First, the behavior must be **Specific**. Ambiguity in identifying the desired behavior leads to employee confusion. Instead of a "laundry list" of combined behaviors, choose one clear and concise behavior. For example, if the improper use of personal protective equipment is a problem, address a specific type of equipment such as eye protection. Next, the behavior must be completely **Objective**. Ensure that your employees clearly understand the desired behavior and under what circumstances it must be exhibited. It must be black or white, no shades of gray. There can be no ambiguity as to whether or not the behavior is occurring. Third, the desired behavior must be **Apparent**. Tangible progress motivates people to change. If the behavior is not obvious, employees will not see the progress and will not be motivated. It is extremely difficult to accurately measure thoughts and feelings. Finally, the behavior must be **Repeatable**. Choosing an unsafe behavior that occurs only once a month, no matter how dangerous, will not allow you to measure and encourage progress.

Once you have identified a behavior, you must measure it to show progress and stimulate future change. To maintain the focus, track the behavior once a day or even more often if you prefer. Conducting measurements is easy. Anytime you walk through the work area, focus on the SOAR behavior. When you observe the behavior, recognize that success. If an employee is not exhibiting the behavior, quietly and privately correct him or her. After two weeks of observations, calculate a baseline success rate and communicate it to your employees. Then continue to measure, emphasize, and, if necessary, correct. Every two weeks, calculate the success rate, chart your progress, and communicate the results to your employees. This consistency will show them you are serious about improving behaviors and will create an expectation on their part. Continue this cycle until your success rate stays at 100% for eight straight weeks. At this point, you have created a culture. Celebrate your success and move on to the next behavior.

Follow the Light of the Stars

At the end of World War II, General Omar Bradley said: "It is time to follow the light of the stars instead of the lights of the passing ships." Traditional safety management focuses too often on the lights of the passing ships. It is time we focused on the light of the stars to create a culture that balances productivity, safety, and quality. The following comparisons will get us on that path.

From Regulations and Written Programs to Work Processes and Management Systems

OSHA has been writing regulations for more than 30 years. You would think that if rules made employees make correct decisions, then after 30 years we would have the rule or rules that would make employees work safely. Rules do not dictate decisions. Yet traditional safety management focuses primarily on the rules and regulations instead of on the leadership and communication skills of our supervisors. Therefore, to remove the separation of safety from productivity, we need to focus on *work processes and management systems* that remove the hazards and minimize the variability in the decision process. This will make safety an integral part of doing business.

From OSHA Rates to Decision-Driving Data

Due to OSHA reporting requirements and the Process Safety Management standard, there is a significant focus on the OSHA Recordable Injury and Illness Rate and the Loss Time Injury and

Illness Rate. Many industrial facilities, like refineries, paper mills, and chemical plants, include OSHA rates as part of the bid process for contractors. Because of this influence, many companies, including the one I worked for in the late 1990's, became very good at managing 'recordability' instead of focusing on prevention. The message we give our employees when we track OSHA rates as our measure of success is this: your behavior is only an issue if you get hurt badly enough to require medical treatment. By tracking a total incident rate, we eliminate the luck and maneuverability inherent in the OSHA rate system. By tracking the true costs of safety failures at the supervisor level, we can better identify who is making smart business decisions and creating a culture of success. Finally, by letting the front-line supervisor emphasize and track a specific behavior that is applicable to their work environment, we let them communicate safety in the same context as productivity and quality. We give them the power and authority to create the work environment they need to succeed.

From Audits and Inspections to The Three E's of Safety

Audits and inspections are a valuable tool for identifying unsafe conditions in the work environment. However, unless the supervisor has the skills and abilities to address the behaviors that contribute to the conditions, the conditions identified will reappear day after day, week after week, and year after year. The key to successfully changing behaviors is based in the Three E's of Safety: Expect, Exhibit, and Emphasize.

Employees need clear expectations in order to be successful. When supervisors change those expectations based on time pressure or competition, employees are unclear as to what rules apply. If one rule is flexible, are the others?

Employees will do what they think their supervisor thinks is important. The supervisor's behavior shows their true feelings. If the supervisor walks through the work area with his protective glasses on top of his head, the employees get the message loud and clear. Unfortunately, that message is that safety is optional. Safe behaviors are tough enough. The supervisor must lead by example.

Each of us makes our moment-by-moment decisions based on three categories of feedback: positive or negative, certain or uncertain, and immediate or future. The strongest motivating feedbacks (certain and immediate) lead most employees *away from* the safe behaviors we need. To counteract this natural, internal feedback, we must create positive, certain, and immediate external feedback for the employee. Only the supervisor is in a position to provide this level of feedback by emphasizing the necessary behavior. Once again, the success of the program falls on the supervisor's ability to communicate and lead.

Make Safety Easy

Your employees show up to work with more than twenty years of experience. Not work experience, life experience. A knowledge and understanding of the tools used in industrial, manufacturing, hazardous waste – or you name the environment - is usually not part of that experience. Most people don't wear protective glasses when they mow their lawn, let alone wear chemical goggles and a splash apron when pouring bleach in the washing machine. However, if you asked an employee to prepare a bath of sodium hypochlorite, wouldn't you put him in chemical goggles and a splash apron? Safe behaviors do not come naturally to us or our employees. Therefore, we must do everything we can to make safety easy. First by eliminating

hazards through engineering controls, then by making the administrative controls and personal protection as easy as possible for the employee to apply. We are all motivated by accomplishments. When the supervisor is equipped with the skills and tools necessary to integrate safety into the definition of 'complete,' then you will be on the path to success. Supervisors are the key. At Branta Worldwide, we design and deliver customized leadership development programs to give your management team the tools they need to succeed.