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Make safety everyone's responsibility, not just that of the loss control department or safety professionals on staff. Safety and productivity can work in harmony. In fact, the desired safer behavior can lead to increased production and profit.

SAFETY LEADERSHIP

The Importance of Safe Behavior (Cannot Be Stressed Enough)

Regulations alone cannot improve safety. Buy-in at all levels is needed to change the culture.

David R. Leng | Jun 15, 2017

Although OSHA-compliant, many employers continue to have injured employees. DuPont demonstrated this point through a study of over 40,000 injuries, where it was revealed that unsafe actions caused over 80 percent of injuries. This illustrates that in order to reduce injuries, you need to improve your safety culture.

When Paul O'Neill was about to step into the role of CEO at Alcoa, financial experts expected Alcoa to announce an aggressive expansion. They were shocked when the first announcement O'Neill made was that he planned to overhaul the company's safety program.

Although Alcoa's program was already considered excellent, O'Neill believed it could be improved. He understood that safety touches every employee in the organization, top to bottom, no matter what position they hold. This is where he wanted to start to change the culture of the organization; to make it a better-performing, better-behaving organization.

O'Neill made safety everyone's responsibility, not just that of the loss control people on staff. Alcoa's productivity soared and injuries dramatically were reduced, proving safety and productivity can work in harmony. In fact, the desired safer behavior can lead to increased production and profit.

Changing the culture and implementing a robust behavior-based safety program is not something you are going to introduce in one meeting; it is going to take time. Think of it as a marathon, not a sprint.

What It Takes

Here is a general outline of what it takes to establish and maintain a behavior-based safety system:

The mission statement – Senior leadership, owners and executives must be involved in crafting the mission statement. The message being delivered through the organization must be that the priority is safety over productivity. Everyone must

understand that doing something safe does not mean doing something slow, but losing sight of safety in favor of production certainly can lead to unsafe behavior. Ultimately, those who will be held accountable should be involved in setting deeper objectives so they understand what needs to be done.

Benchmarking – If you do not measure and record, you cannot determine if you are improving. Items you want to record and benchmark include OSHA recordables and DART rates (days away, restricted duty or transitional duty) in order to compare them to other peer organizations. You also should include near misses and observed unsafe actions. Keep in mind that OSHA recordables, DART and near misses should all have specific numeric goals established that reduce over time. This way, you can determine the success of your program.

Senior management must track and measure various components in order to hold supervisors accountable. Executives within the organization must monitor supervisors to establish whether they are doing their jobs in terms of safety. Nothing will undo a safety program quicker than a supervisor who only is focused on productivity with no regard for safety. Establish a line of communication for feedback from bottom to top. If an employee feels his supervisor is ignoring a situation that has been brought to his or her attention, the employee must feel comfortable going over the supervisor's head to resolve the situation and must be able to do so without fear of repercussions. Employees also should know the chain of command.

Establishing accountability and a peer review process – This starts with the owners, executives or CEO reviewing senior management, senior management reviewing supervisors and supervisors reviewing workers.

There also should be a peer review process. This process includes a co-worker, maybe acting as the safety person of the day, or simply a longer tenured employee in a work group observing the operations of their co-workers, because a supervisor may not always be present or even fully aware of all the exposures associated with doing a particular job.

Basically, you must be able to create a checklist of both unsafe and safe behaviors for supervisors and peer observers to use. Measuring and recording is the key to this process. You will need ongoing training for observers so they can learn from each other, as well as from outside trainers or coaches. More importantly, as your team learns these items and actions, corrections must be recorded in the training manual. This allows training of current observers, as well as new observers who can be trained to monitor their co-workers.

Responsibility – In establishing organizational responsibility levels, please understand it is a two-way street up and down the organization. Those below should feel comfortable going “up the ladder” in order to ensure those above them address key issues and situations. All goals and actions should be result-oriented. Everything requires reporting and measuring; otherwise, it ends up meaningless and without consequences.

Accountability

Here are some subsets of the levels of accountability, both employee and organizational:

- **Personal** – You must make each employee responsible for their own actions.
- **Team** – There is shared accountability for the performance of a work group or team through the use of peer review.
- **Organizational** – There is internal accountability not only laterally up and down the chain, but also externally to those who are working at a job site. The actions of other contractors could put your employees in harm's way or vice versa. From an accountability standpoint, you have the obligation to make certain contractors are aware of any unsafe situations that puts your employees in a dangerous situation, and then correct the situation.

Here is an example of what is necessary when implementing a behavior-based safety program:

A building materials dealer has a delivery truck show up at 4:30 pm on a Friday to deliver kitchen cabinets. All of the loading dock spots are full of trucks, most of them already set for the next day's deliveries.

The driver wants to leave as quickly as possible, so he asks, "I need to get going. Can you get one of your employees to help unload the truck?" The supervisor sends one of his employees out into the yard to start unloading the truck. In the course of unloading the truck and removing the cabinets, the employee falls off the back of the truck, shattering his elbow.

That employee was put in harm's way because the supervisor was focused on getting the truck out as quickly as possible instead of on safety. They could have moved a fully loaded truck out, thereby allowing the delivery truck to come in and be safely unloaded. Moving it would have taken less than five minutes and probably would have shortened the amount of time needed to unload the truck. This incident could have been prevented by the supervisor simply telling the driver to wait until a truck was moved so he could pull in.

As a result of the incident, the employee will have permanent problems with his elbow, and the employer will see an increased experience modifier, resulting in over \$130,000 in additional premiums; all because the supervisor put the perception of productivity ahead of safety.

The employer suspended the supervisor without pay for two weeks to reinforce to all his employees and supervisors that management will not tolerate unsafe actions or short cuts. To have your message "heard" by your employees, you must reinforce your message with consequences.

The goal of every organization should not simply be OSHA-compliant, but to actually create a safer, more productivity-oriented culture, much like Paul O'Neill did at Alcoa. Only then will behavioral safety become the company mantra.

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