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Engaging Employees and Safety Culture

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With being the “new kid on the block”, I was glad to be able to participate in the recent KING Rounds held in February. What I really enjoyed was the opportunity to hear from many of you on what your biggest challenges were. In addition, the main issues pointed out were “On-going training and safety Culture”.

From my many years in the safety & health profession, I have found that these go hand in hand. However, the key to success is to have positive Employee Engagement. So, what really is Employee Engagement? “Employee engagement is a property of the relationship between an organization and its employees.” An “engaged employee” is one who is fully absorbed by and enthusiastic about their work so it takes positive action to further the organization’s reputation and interest.

What are some signs of a Disengaged Workforce?

- Employees don’t report minor injuries or hazards
- Low participation in safety committees and other safety related meetings
- Lack of respect for the safety program; feeling that management is not serious about it
- Employees regularly break the safety rules if they think they won’t get caught
- Safety performance does not improve despite adequate OSHA compliance, leadership commitment, training etc.

And there are just as many reasons for an employee’s Internal Justification for Disengagement:

- This safety policy makes my job harder
- Management is just waiting to catch me violating a safety rule
- I have been saying we need to make this change for years; it is finally changing because of an accident
- Management violates the safety rules but wants us to follow them
- I reported a safety concern two months ago; nobody did anything about it
- I have been working this way for 30 years and have never been hurt; I do not see the importance of safety

Hazards in the workplace can be seen as a combination of the physical demands of the work and the complexity of the work. Job resources provide a buffering effect that protects the employees from job demands like high work pressure, an unfavorable physical environment, and emotionally demanding interactions.^[1]



Why do you want a strong safety culture?

It has been observed at the OSHA Voluntary Protection Programs (VPP) sites and confirmed by independent research that developing strong safety cultures have the single greatest impact on accident reduction of any process. It is for this single reason that developing these cultures should be top priority for all managers and supervisors.

What is a safety culture - how will it affect my organization?

Safety cultures consist of shared beliefs, practices, and attitudes that exist at an organization. Culture is the atmosphere created by those beliefs, attitudes, etc., which shape our behavior. An organization's safety culture is the result of a number of factors such as:

- Management and employee norms, assumptions and beliefs
- Management and employee attitudes
- Values, myths, stories
- Policies and procedures
- Supervisor priorities, responsibilities and accountability
- Actions or lack of action to correct unsafe behaviors
- Employee training and motivation
- Employee involvement or "buy-in"

Building a safety culture

Any process that brings all levels within the organization together to work on a common goal that everyone holds in high value will strengthen the organizational culture. Worker safety and health is a unique area that can do this. It is one of the few initiatives that offer significant benefits for the front-line work force. As a result, buy-in can be achieved enabling the organization to effectively implement change. Obtaining front line buy-in for improving worker safety and health is much easier than it is to get buy-in for improving quality or increasing profitability.

On-going Support

Reinforcement, feedback, reassessment, mid-course corrections, and on-going training is vital to sustaining continuous improvement.

Resources

- ^[1] Nahrgang, J.D., Morgeson, F.P., & Hofman, D.A. (2011). Safety at work: A meta-analytic investigation of the link between job demands, job resources, burnout, engagement, and safety outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 96(1), 71-94.
- www.OSHA.gov

Editor's Note:

The KING Safety Matters newsletter is published monthly to provide general safety information. It is not a substitute for adequate safety training, or intended to provide complete safety information or training, on any specific subject. The information contained herein is intended to assist safety efforts, and increase safety awareness.

In order to ensure the contents of the newsletter are helpful and important to you, please feel free to send comments, suggestions and feedback to:

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