



Safety Culture

5 Ways to Drive an Efficient Safety Culture, from Kimberly-Clark

Matt Morgan | Oct 02, 2023

A company that values safety and actively works to protect employees at the job site realizes many benefits. It reduces accidents and injuries first and foremost, it boosts employee engagement and morale, which help with recruitment and retention, and it increases worker productivity, which is good for the bottom line.

Kimberly-Clark Professional provides more than essential products and services that help make manufacturing workplaces exceptional. The Irving, Texas-based business is also a trusted manufacturer in its own right, one that takes safety seriously. Through the years, Kimberly-Clark has maintained a notable safety track record within its facilities.

Here's what you can learn about fostering a safety culture in the workplace with insights from Kimberly-Clark safety experts.

Safety and Sustainability

An effective safety culture is a reflection of an effective overall workplace culture. Nurturing both takes vision, planning and working together for a common good.

At Kimberly-Clark Professional, environmental protection is integral to the common good. Because safety improvement and environmental stewardship are intertwined, employees are willing to support both efforts, which uplifts the culture.

According to Dylan Fine, environmental health and safety leader at Kimberly-Clark's Loudon, Tennessee, mill, a landfill waste diversion program is an easy-to-implement way for a company to do its part in protecting the environment and building sustainability awareness across the employee base.

Kimberly-Clark's commitment to helping manufacturing sites be more sustainable is reflected in the *RightCycle Program*, a waste diversion initiative that turns qualifying used personal protective equipment (PPE) into new consumer goods.

Fine considers waste diversion a critical component of the Loudon site's sustainability initiatives. He has successfully built buy-in and participation by appealing to his peers. "I connect landfill diversion with how it impacts the family, kids, hobbies and leisure activities," he says. "I ask them, do you like to hike, camp, fish with your kids and family? Connecting waste and its effect on the environment highlights the importance of the company's sustainability efforts."

Establish Clear Objectives

Creating an efficient safety culture starts with clear objectives. To begin, visualize what success looks like in terms of safety at the company, and how safety relates to the company overall. What is the goal? Is it limiting the number of accidents or injuries? Reducing lost-time cases? Hosting more safety inspections or training courses? Or some combination of these?

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Pam Dickens

Kimberly-Clark Professional

Kimberly-Clark maintains a focus on people, processes and sustainability and strives to protect and elevate these pillars through its annual safety plans. The holistic approach, centered on people, is pivotal to driving a successful culture at the company; in fact, it is what enabled Kimberly-Clark to react quickly and efficiently to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Leveraging a business continuity plan provided by the crisis management team, each site successfully implemented precautionary measures to prioritize employee health and safety while also minimizing disruptions to everyday operations.

Read more: Sustainable Manufacturing: How Kimberly-Clark's RightCycle Program Helps Organizations Manage PPE Waste

Create a Strategic Plan

Once a clear objective is in place, the next step is to develop a plan to achieve it. A principal part of a strategic plan is to identify any issues that stand in the way of improved safety at the workplace and create or rebuild programs that address those issues.

"A relentless pursuit to identify hazards and at-risk behaviors is the key to mitigating risks," says Pam Dickens, safety leader at Kimberly-Clark's Owensboro, Kentucky, mill. "We do this through a planned inspection process and through touch points with our teams. The touch points keep everyone engaged, so they feel like they own our programs."

At Kimberly-Clark, the strength of a safety plan is its ability to tie back to its objective of protecting people, processes and the environment across all sites of the organization. By hosting annual strategic meetings, Kimberly-Clark gathers corporate leaders, site managers and mill employees to work cross-functionally to build and implement the proper policies and procedures to address top-of-mind needs.

Measure Success

If it gets measured, it gets done, the old saying goes. Regarding a company's safety plan, metrics such as the number of accidents or injuries, lost-time cases, or safety training courses all can be tracked. But focusing only on these indicators may not give the full picture of safety at the worksite.

Requiring leaders to report on their safety initiatives, for example—either daily, weekly or on some other cadence—ensures that safety remains a priority throughout the company and helps strengthen the safety culture.

When employees have visibility into these metrics, they may be motivated to improve them.



Image courtesy of Kimberly-Clark Professional

By providing several ways to report issues—such as installing a comment box in the facility and promoting an open-door policy for employees to talk to managers—the reporting process will be easier and workers more likely to participate. The company should respond to commenters in a timely manner and without negative repercussions and should communicate this policy clearly. Rewarding employees for reporting safety issues is one way to encourage input.

Continuously Improve

If COVID-19 taught us anything, it's that even the most established processes or procedures can quickly become obsolete. Companies with effective safety cultures seek to continually change processes to improve them.

Understanding this, Kimberly-Clark builds maturity models to assess what is working now and what might need to be changed to improve things moving forward. Through self-assessments, the company measures compliance across corporate standards and the standards of regulatory bodies such as the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and identifies gaps and opportunities.

Kimberly-Clark safety experts say that continuous improvement requires input from a cross-functional team—including the site lead and representatives from environmental health and services, occupational health, procurement and sustainability. When aligned, the team is able to quickly gauge the safety plan's implementation and success of policies and procedures, respond to issues and pivot when necessary.

Read more: Putting Safety First Increases Productivity and Efficiency

Make Sure Everyone Is on Board

Like most high-functioning groups, manufacturers will have the greatest success when everybody at the company knows the objective and rallies behind it, creating a sense of ownership and accountability.

Dickens says achieving compliance with the company's safety culture goals starts with ensuring that the policies and procedures are clearly understood. "The main way to gain buy-in from all levels of our team starts with exceptional communication, so that site goals are fully understood," she says. "From there, we involve our technicians to drive program implementation and adequate training."

Effective communication could involve hosting periodic safety talks. If qualified employees are willing to give the presentations, the message may resonate better than having an outside party come in.

To strengthen buy-in from employees at all levels, safety policies should be followed by employees at all levels. If executives and senior managers are committed to complying with company safety policies, it serves as a positive, effective model for others.

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