



How-to

Improve Your Productivity By Building A Safety Culture

Kimberly-Clark Professional | Jun 16, 2017

Starting with Safety

Everyone who works in manufacturing has seen someone risk safety in the name of productivity.

We reach around a machine guard to keep a process running. We bypass lockout procedures to save minutes because minutes count in productivity. Most in manufacturing could tell a story about how this behavior has led to accidents.

This mentality is not only dangerous, it is short sighted. In fact, it's flat out wrong. In high-performance manufacturing organizations safety and productivity goals are not in conflict. They work together. These goals are an outcome of continuous improvement efforts focused on day-to-day changes that achieve both. Safety enhances productivity. And productivity improves safety.

Not only is safety an important part of a highly functional continuous improvement program. It's also a great place to start.

Costs Involved

Everyone is talking about the cost of accidents.

Safety organizations think if employers understand how much accidents cost them then they will take action to avoid them. In the U.S., medical benefits payouts of over \$125 million dollars per day are paid to disabled workers and the survivors of deceased workers.¹ When you factor in lost time and lost production the cost of accidents skyrockets to about \$25 billion per day in the US.¹

These macro figures are useful but it's hard to apply them to the impact at one facility. So what's the cost of a common accident to an individual facility? Right now the estimated employers cost of a puncture injury, including workers compensation, lost time, and lost production, is about \$53,000.² \$53,000 is a lot of money. But it's not as compelling as a number with 9 zeros. For most manufacturers a \$53,000 cost is unwelcome but isn't going to shut the plant down.

Looking at the cost of accidents in workers compensation, lost time, and lost production misses the point. When you do think about cost you need to think about the opportunity cost of not improving—forgoing all the gains that could be made in both safety and productivity if continuous improvement doesn't happen. What is the real cost of not building a workplace that is as safe and productive as it could be? That's harder to quantify but in aggregate it's much larger than the \$25 billion paid per day employees are paying in worker compensation. It could cost you everything.

¹ Source: Sengupta, Ishita, *Social Security Office of Retirement and Disability - Annual Statistical Supplement, 2015*.

² Source - United States Department of Labor, *Occupational Safety and Health Administration Cost Calculator*.

Why Start with Safety?

Safety is a great place to start when improving productivity. It's just more engaging emotionally than productivity and quality improvement, which can be seen as serving only the company, especially when things aren't going well. A focus on safety can reinvigorate a low-morale workplace. Safety culture is about that obligation to protect each other in what can be a dangerous work environment. It's about a desire to return home to our families in one piece. It's about soft skills in action—teamwork, building trust, and focusing on a common goal.

Safety to Productivity in 4 Steps

Building a continuous improvement program that integrates safety and productivity isn't easy. But the rewards can be big. Here are four steps you can take to get started:

1. Set Expectations with Safety

Start with a communication campaign at all levels of the organization that safety is going to be a focus. This includes direction of what is expected of every employee. The goal is to get workers to start thinking about safety every day. At Kimberly-Clark we developed our Three Safety Obligations as a focus for all of our safety efforts—both in communications and in practice on the shop floor.

Three Safety Obligations from Kimberly-Clark

- You are obligated to refuse to take any action you consider unsafe.
- You are obligated to confront anyone performing or about to perform an unsafe act.
- You are obligated, if confronted, to immediately stop what you are doing and resolve the concern.

The Three Safety Obligations are all about helping each other stay safe in the workplace. This teamwork approach has generated significant engagement—and significant results. Kimberly-Clark has a recordable injury rate that is more than 10 times better than the average for our industry.

2. Prove that Safety is Important

You can't just talk about safety. You have to live it. This means being willing to make tough decisions when safety seems to conflict with other priorities. Walk the talk. Communicate that you are willing to shut down equipment instead of risking injury. Then consistently do it when the opportunity arises. Walk frequently through the facility to reinforce the obligation that workers have to protect each other.

Point out when someone should have stopped someone else from working. Every leader should become a safety coach, not an enforcer, on the floor. Word will quickly get around that things are changing.

3. Build an Integrated Safety Ideas Program

Build a program that solves safety problems every day by empowering workers to identify and implement ideas. Remember the model for a high-performing, integrated ideas system:

Ideas are integrated into everyday work.

- The emphasis is on small ideas.
- Front-line performance metrics focus ideas on what is important.
- Both managers and workers are held accountable for their roles in the idea process.

4. Add Productivity

Once you have employees engaged in day-to-day problem solving you can expand the scope of the program to include other performance metrics. Workers may even start doing this on their own once they see the power of continuous improvement making their jobs better. Add front-line metrics around productivity and quality and start the ideas flowing.

Conclusion

Safety and productivity aren't at odds at high-performance manufacturing companies. They reinforce each other. Continuous improvement programs that work solve both safety and productivity problems every day. The key is to engage front-line employees to lead the effort. Getting them to own their personal safety and the safety of their coworkers is a great way to get a winning continuous improvement effort off the ground.