



Workplace Safety

How to Improve Safety Culture in the Workplace

Tim Gower | Mar 01, 2017

What You Need to Know

Your safety program needs buy-in from all your employees.
Seven steps to help employees get in the mindset for safety.
Steps include starting the conversation and being ready for resistance.

Taking the time to make sure your associates are safety-minded can make all the difference in your safety program.

Keeping employees out of harm's way means more than handing out safety glasses and requiring steel-toe boots. Instilling a safety mindset in your entire workforce not only reduces the risk of on-the-job accidents and injuries, but also boosts productivity and your company's bottom line. The key is to create a "culture of safety" within your workplace, making it second nature for employees to take necessary and appropriate cautions when performing their jobs.

Of course, changing the way people think and act can be a daunting challenge. Taking the following steps can help create a strong culture of safety in your organization, says Frank Quarato, president of the Center for Safety & Environmental Management, which offers safety training and education

programs.

1. Form a safety team

Enlist colleagues from throughout your organization who are passionate about identifying and eliminating safety issues at your worksite, and who have a collaborative spirit. Include workers who are “early adopters,” embracing change and innovation.

2. Start a conversation about safety

Before you establish new rules for procedures, talk with employees about how they do their jobs, and why they use those methods. That will give you insight into where potential safety problems exist and make employees feel involved in the safety initiative.

3. Hold safety-training sessions

Tacking up posters detailing new safety procedures isn't enough; frequently training or retraining employees to use safe techniques is essential.

4. Be ready for resistance

A chief executive officer or floor manager may say, “We've been in business 30 years and never had safety training. Why do we need it now?” Point out that preventing accidents not only limits workers' compensation and unemployment costs, but also lowers your company's experience modification rate (EMR), a metric that represents a firm's history of insurance claims and its safety record relative to other companies in the same industry. A poor EMR not only raises insurance premiums, but might also create a perception that your company has unsafe practices, which could cost you business.

5. Hold associates accountable

A supervisor must monitor employees to ensure they aren't ignoring new rules. “But that supervisor is just as responsible for catching employees doing a job the right way,” says Quarato. Recognizing employees who practice safe techniques (with a gift card to a local sandwich shop, perhaps) can set an example for other workers.

6. Match employees' capabilities to required tasks

This is particularly important with an aging workforce; older employees may risk injury by performing some jobs, whether it's climbing on a piece of heavy machinery for a repair or loading a truck.

7. Create a safe environment

It's hard to adopt a safety mindset if protective equipment is outdated or missing. As part of your safety initiative, conduct a thorough personal protective equipment (PPE) assessment.

As you implement each of these changes, employees may argue that safety-compromising shortcuts they have always used save them time. A classic example is removing safety guards on machines with blades, grinders or other sharp instruments to make them easier to use. Quarato counters that safety equipment need not inhibit productivity if workers are properly trained, an idea he says "can really catch on like wildfire. Employees like knowing that there are ways to do their jobs right, and be safer doing them."

What tactics do you use to make sure workers are thinking about safety?

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