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## Safety Culture

Why are you working unsafely? A question we often ask a worker not following safety best practices or after reviewing the details and an incident report. Many organizations have good safety policies, good work procedures, and measure safety success, but they continue to have unsafe work practices throughout the organization. The question is why, and what can be done to address these issues that lead to accidents and injuries.

Many times the “root cause” of the unsafe work practices is the organization’s culture as it relates to safety. Sure, many companies tout themselves as having a “great safety culture”, but do the actions of the workforce reflect this perceived culture.

Culture is defined by Webster as “the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization”. In order to determine the culture an organization they must take a hard look at themselves and evaluate their actions, not just the written policies or slogans on the bulletin board.

As a safety professional or leader of the organization here a few questions you might ask yourself to assess your “safety culture”:

*Do you tolerate minor safety rule infractions? e.g. not wearing PPE in a required area*

*Do you ignore unsafe work practices? e.g. improper lifting or hopping of the piece of equipment*

*Are you simply “writing up” employees after witnessing an unsafe behavior?*

*Is your safety program focused purely on OSHA compliance?*

*Do you discipline employees after a workplace accident or injury?*

*Do you measure safety success by the number of accident or injuries?*

If you answered yes to any of the questions above there may be an opportunity to improve your safety culture.

Building and maintaining a strong safety culture begins with leaders willing to look inward to identify the flaws in the system within the organization. It requires consistent enforcement and a commitment to coaching safe work practices on a daily basis, not just using disciplinary action. Letting the “little things go” will only lead to bigger risks over time and creates a culture of employees guessing which rules are important and which can be ignored. No one likes being told what to do, so educating workers “the why” behind safety rather than just telling them the rules will help achieve a greater buy in. It also requires looking beyond compliance and injury statistics to measure success or failure.

So what you can you do to build a safety culture? It begins with identifying the leaders in your organization that will create an atmosphere that engages others to be a part of the journey to improve safety. In the words of Jim Collins (author of *Good to Great*, 2001) “First who, then what”, you have to get the right people on the bus if you want to achieve success in any aspect of business, and this is particularly true in regards to safety.

There is no magic pill for building a safety culture. It takes a firm commitment and a plan. The good news is all employees have a vested interest in being safe. It just takes leaders to build a safety culture that will bring out the best in the workforce to practice safety on a daily basis.

If you have questions about safety or managing your risk, please drop me a note or call and I will be glad to assist.

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