Safely Home, Everyone, Everyday: Influencing Your Culture of Safety

Submitted Questions

1. **How do I assess if my organization is in the top 10 percentile for safety and risk management?**

   There are three or four good benchmarks for top 10 performance. The first resides with the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics (BLS). The BLS maintains rates by SIC and NACIS codes. You can look at Total Recordable Incident Rate, Lost Workday Case Rate and Lost Workday Rates. The average for the industry is available in the tables. Using some of the detailed reports, top 10 performance can be identified. An easier way would be to say we would like to be 25% or 50% better than the industry.

   In addition to accident rates, you can also look at the Total Cost of Risk. The Risk & Insurance Management Society (RIMS) publishes a Total Cost of Risk Benchmark report annually. The report provides you benchmarks for:

   a.) cost of risk transfer (insurance)

   b.) the cost of retained risk (deductibles, indirect costs, etc.)

   c.) cost of the Risk Management effort

   The information is segmented by Industry Group and Size of organization with benchmarks set at quartile level (the first quartile pays X, the second quartile pays Y). Do you pay at the best level, worst level or in between compared to your peers?

   Finally, many industry groups such as the Associated General Contractors (AGC) provide recognition for safety performance with metrics that are specific to their industry.

2. **Any suggestions for an aging workforce?**

   Aging workforces are difficult to manage. The research indicates that older workers have lower accident frequency than their younger counterparts but higher accident severity. Whenever possible older workers should be allowed to alter their pace, technique or weight limits to avoid injuries. In addition, having plans to address the severity such as retirement or settlement options to reduce the potential costs can help to reduce the impact of an aging workforce on an organization.

3. **Where would you recommend a company start? Would a good first step be with implementing safety in the onboarding process for new employees?**

   A great goal for creating a strong safety culture could be reducing the accident rate of new hire employees (first year) to 50% of the remaining workforce's rate. As part of that, improving onboarding can be an effective approach. That includes improvements in hiring practices, initial safety and production training, job instruction training and reinforcement. Many organizations focus on the first two – hiring and then a formal safety orientation. Focusing on job instruction training and reinforcement can often times have more constructive results.

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4. Do you have a favorite type of incentive program?

I like incentives that target a specific loss source and the behaviors and conditions that allow it to occur. For example, to prevent Material Handling Injuries for Rodbusters (rebar in concrete) you may focus on the behaviors of working below the knees, carrying rebar on unpadded shoulders and lifting and tying rebar on vertical mats. You may also want to reduce the conditions of tying rebar in place. Quantifying these behaviors and conditions and then rewarding (incentivizing) employees based on the control or reduction of the behaviors or conditions seem to work best for me when trying to improve an organization's results.

5. Are safety meetings required each month?

We typically have one per month. We also have 17 different locations. All locations are expected to have their own safety meeting each month based on a given topic. Safety Training, Safety Meetings and Safety Committee requirements are jurisdictional. Typically, in construction there are daily or weekly safety meetings. In many manufacturing environments there are weekly or monthly meetings. I always work backwards to get my schedule. I ask myself – What do my folks need to know based on exposures and compliance requirements? How often do I need to make sure they are trained on the topics? How do I ensure they received the information?

6. How do we get the strong leaders onboard so that they can help influence safety instead of dismissing the need?

Whenever a consultant comes back to me with stories of lack of cooperation or buy-in to one of their solutions, I have a simple question – do they agree with the problem you are trying to solve? Often times, you can gain the support of leaders by gaining agreement on the problem. For example, getting a grizzled veteran to agree that new hires are having far too many accidents should be done long before you try to get the veteran to own training the new hire. My advice for addressing strong personalities and leaders is to begin by focusing on an agreement to a specific problem.

7. If an employee gets a minor injury (e.g., cut, sore back, burn) and they waive/ refuse to be seen at the clinic, is that ok? Can we force them to check out? What's they best way to handle these situations?

I do not believe you can force employees to see a doctor if they do not want to. It is likely a jurisdictional question so asking your claims adjustor is the best way to determine if you can force them to the clinic. Coming at it from a position of caring about the employees' health is the best approach.

8. What are examples of safety culture goals? Are they just policies to do?
Safety culture goals vary significantly by the organization. Effective safety goals and objectives can be developed for our organization if a few principles are followed:

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a.) What is your VISION for what needs to be done in the next year? For example, trying to reduce new hire accidents, or material handling exposures, trying to ensure 100% of new hires are trained, etc.

b.) Understand what needs to be done to achieve the vision. This means more than an activity. It means the activity must be performed properly to be effective. It is not sufficient to say weekly walk-around safety inspections will be performed. Instead, think about the desired outcome of identifying and correcting unsafe conditions.

c.) Be sure the goal is level-appropriate. First level supervisors' goals are likely to involve interaction with front-line workers and the use of safety systems. Senior executives' goals are more likely to involve monitoring the performance of other managers and communicating priorities. In every case, the goal should reflect where the individual can have the greatest impact on making safety efforts effective.

d.) Express the goal in specific, concrete, measureable terms. In our walk-around inspection example, we might decide the right goal is to conduct weekly safety walk-around inspections during each of which the inspector engages with at least two hourly employees, provides feedback on some observed safety practice), and asks the employee about whether they are aware of any safety issues needing attention.

e.) Express the goal in terms that consider the desired culture – that is, how as well as what is to be done. In the example immediately above, including in the goal the expectation that workers will be engaged and feedback will be given in the right way reinforces the culture. If the goal were simply expressed as "do a weekly inspection," that cultural reinforcement might or might not occur.

f.) There must be some way of tracking and measuring performance against the goal. This may be a formal recordkeeping mechanism, or may be periodic check-ins by the individual's manager, or may be self-reporting. However, whatever method is going to be used, it should be decided upon at the outset when the goal is established.

g.) Regularly check in on progress being made against the goal. If a goal is established and then not ever discussed, it is easy for the person with the goal to conclude that the goal is there simply for "cosmetic" reasons. However, if the boss periodically asks for an update on progress being made, it becomes clear that the goal is important to the organization.

9. **With the new laws effective this year, does child care remain exempt from reporting to OSHA? Is this best practice?**

   OSHA reporting is jurisdictional so check with your local office. Most reporting exemptions are based on size, not industry. Several years ago OSHA stated that "Child daycare service facilities, including nursery schools and preschool centers, fall under the category of general industry and should observe OSHA regulations with regard to the safety and health of staff and children."

10. **Is it ok to post days without an accident?**

    It is great to celebrate success and to post things like this help to celebrate success. The real issue is when there are individual incentives or group incentives for no accidents that are translated by employees to hide the accident in order to get the incentive.

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