



Toolbox Talks

Building A Safety Culture Part 1

Safety Culture can be thought of as the values, beliefs, perceptions, & normal behaviors that are shared by employees. Whether it is intentional or not, every organization has a safety culture. The question is whether the safety culture is what we want it to be & what can we do to change it.

POSITIVE SAFETY CULTURE:

- ☑ Communication is open at all levels of the organization & feedback is seen as vital to improving safety processes.
- ☑ Individuals at all levels focus on what can be done to prevent injuries or illnesses.
- ☑ There is a commitment to safety regardless of all other concerns in the business.
- ☑ People & their well-being are valued. The focus is on protecting people, not the bottom line.
- ☑ All personnel, especially senior managers, demonstrate their commitment to safety by following all safety processes & procedures, just as they instruct their employees to do.

NEGATIVE SAFETY CULTURE:

- ☑ Communication is not open at all levels; employees do not openly communicate with upper management.
- ☑ Safety rules are used to discipline employees.
- ☑ Management may not follow safety rules (for example, not wearing hearing protection or other PPE as they are supposed to).
- ☑ Production demands require less focus on safety.
- ☑ Management's concern is not for the well being of the employees, but rather for a good safety record.

Auditing Ourselves

When the word audit is mentioned, people generally think of a negative experience, an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax audit or of a confrontation. However, it is possible for audits to be positive.

First, let's consider the definition of audit. **Audit: A systematic or methodical review; to examine with intent to verify.**

Audits can apply to your job. **From a safety standpoint there is only one way to do a job - the safe way.** Safety needs to be the first consideration in everything we do. It is possible that we may not always be doing this, so our continuing efforts to review or think about our jobs are auditing.

Contrary to an IRS audit which evaluates what we did not record, our job audit should evaluate what we did record. If we take the time to at least mentally think out the steps that we go through to perform a task, we can audit it to ensure we are safe.

How To Audit Yourself

Things to consider prior to completing a task:

- PPE: Do we have the correct eye protection? The correct gloves? Protective footwear?
- Do we need any special PPE such as a chemical apron or a harness?
- Is our PPE in good condition?
- Do we have the correct tools & are they in good shape?
- Do we know how to operate the tools or equipment?
- Do we know how to accomplish the task safely?
- Do we know the harmful energy sources around the area, & have we isolated them?

These are a just a few of the questions we should ask. Ensure that you do a quick audit prior to accomplishing a task. A more thorough one should be done if you're doing something for the first time or for the first time in a long time.

Safety in the Absence of Unreasonable Risk

Safety is the absence of unreasonable risk. While this is one of the best definitions of "safety" out there, **"safety" is actually an outcome or result.** The statement might better be: "Safety is an outcome of the absence of unreasonable risk". Regardless of how you state it, the focus on keeping workers safe & healthy has greater financial & reputational incentives than ever before.

The irony of this focus is that in spite of companies supplying better PPE, writing better safe work procedures, & focusing on emergency preparation, injuries, & even fatalities, continue. In fact, workplace fatalities have been increasing & tend to increase in step with how busy the economy is. It is the increase of unsafe acts that is driving these statistics.

Unsafe acts account for 80 - 90% of all injuries. To be fair, many unsafe acts take place because a worker is new & does not know better. Essentially this is an unsafe condition, because a company is required by law to inform & train workers about the hazards of their job. Usually unsafe act injuries occur because someone is taking a short cut, trying to save time. This calculation is always flawed. If you rationally step back & look at the situation, you quickly see that **you never save time taking short cuts.** A classic example is jumping down from a one meter wall (39 inches for the metrically impaired). You can jump down without injury quite a number of times. However, if you do not see the wet spot on the floor that is extremely slippery, if you slip just before you jump, if someone placed something on your landing spot, you can sustain a significant injury. For the sake of argument, say you tweaked your ankle & had to do Modified Duties for a week: How many thousand times do you have to jump instead of sitting down & swinging your legs over the side before you get hurt? & what if you had injured yourself more severely? What if you broke your back & ended your working career? There is no short cut that is worthwhile. If you think that what you are doing might be risky, it probably is. It pays to stop several times a day & give yourself that 4 second check to see what hazards there might be around you. You might find an easier & safer way to move something. You might discover that conditions have changed since last time. In the end, the vast majority of unreasonable risk is from our own risk taking. If we truly think about what we are doing, we are less likely to sustain an injury.

Safe Attitudes: Setting An Example

I was in a shipyard when I observed a worker perched precariously high & above the ground on a structural member. The Safety Manager signed time out & said, "Let's talk about this." The worker replied angrily, "Are we here to play safety or to build ships?" Fortunately for everyone, including himself, this employee was soon gone. Think about this man's attitude toward safety. We probably agree that his outlook was negative.

Negative attitudes toward safety lead to negative results -- accidents. Experience has shown us that all the safety training & equipment in the world cannot ensure safety without the proper safety attitude also being present. Is your attitude toward safety positive or negative? Is safety part of your job, or is it an obstacle someone has put in your way to make your job more difficult?

Hopefully you will accept the fact that safety is part of your job. If you can accept that fact, not only will you increase your chances of going home uninjured at the end of the day, you may also find that your life at work becomes a bit more pleasant. How so? Enforcing safety rules is part of your supervisor's job. If you violate safety rules, the supervisor must correct you. This can lead to resentment. You have to understand that giving someone a break when they ignore safety rules actually encourages further breaking of the rules & can set up a situation leading to an accident & injury. If you do not have a safe attitude, then it becomes the supervisor's job to change your behavior. Generally this involves some sort of discipline, something no one likes to do or to receive. You can avoid this unpleasantness by simply following the rules & changing your attitude yourself. **Remember, although your employer may have a legal obligation to make & enforce the rules, they are made to protect you.** You are the primary beneficiary.



Toolbox Talks



Building A Safety Culture Part 2

It's YOUR Decision

Most of us like to get our work done with the least amount of effort & as quickly as possible. We all want to get the most work out of the energy we use on the job. This is good because it often results in discovering newer & more efficient ways of getting our job done. This *energy-saving* attitude can also be bad if we make a wrong decision & take dangerous shortcuts. All of us, at some time or another, have exposed ourselves to possible injury by taking a *shortcut* when, with a little extra effort, we could have done it the safe way. When we were kids, we took shortcuts by jumping the fence instead of using the gate. Now that we are adults, we do it by crossing the street between the crosswalks. Why? Because we want to get there as quickly as possible & use the least amount of energy we can while doing it.

There is no doubt about it, *the safe way is not always the shortest or quickest way*. The safe way usually takes some extra effort, while the unsafe way often appears to be more efficient at the time. **When we are faced with these situations, each one of us will make a conscious decision about what actions we will take next.**

Sometimes we talk ourselves into taking an unsafe shortcut by flawed reasoning. We convince ourselves that it is worth taking the risk because we're in a hurry & can probably get away with it this time without being injured. After all, we have done it before & were not injured then.

Take the electrician I saw the other day who was working on a ladder. He was almost finished with the job except for a little work that he could do only by reaching a little farther than he knew was safe. He knows he will be taking a chance, so he has to *make a decision* whether to get down & move the ladder or to take a shortcut.

Suppose he takes the shortcut. He may get away without having an accident, or he may fall & suffer an injury that will change his whole life - or even end it. Whatever the result, his decision to take a chance is not a good one. Whether he wins or loses this time; risking his neck to save a few minutes' time is rolling the dice - a gamble that he will, eventually, lose.

When you get right down to it though, I don't really think most of us take shortcuts to save time as much as we do it because the safe way is just too much trouble. Like using the wrong tool because it's too much trouble to get the right one. Like climbing the rebar because it's too much trouble to get a ladder. Like leaving a heavy tool on the top of a ladder because it'll just take a second to get the screw you dropped. Or maybe like lifting more than you know is safe because it's too much trouble to get someone to help you. Or maybe it's like the guy I saw the other day swinging around like a monkey on the side of some forms, holding on with one hand while trying to strip forms with the other, all because it's too much trouble to go get a safety belt & tie off like he knows he should. Or how about another guy that was chipping concrete without safety goggles because it was too much trouble to go hunt up a pair.

Remember, you always have a choice, but only you can decide to do it the safe way. The safe way is usually not the shortest or quickest way, but it's your decision.

Bring Your Child To Work Today

Almost 20 years ago, an organization started encouraging employees & employers to have a designated 'take your child to work day' at the end of April. At some places the practice has taken hold, at others it hasn't. It's truly a novel idea & one we can utilize to work safer. The suggestion would be to make everyday bring your child or grandchild to work day, not in body, but in mind. As you go out to work today, I'd challenge you to do two things: **Do your various tasks as if your child or grandchild was next to you & you were teaching them the correct way to do it.**

When you stop & think about the various things you do, put them in the perspective that you are telling your child or grandchild to do it the way you are. With that in mind, I'm guessing there are some things you do on a regular basis that you would not ask your child to do. You would teach them a different way or the prescribed way rather than the way you do it. My challenge is to keep that perspective in everything you do.

All information found at safetytoolboxtalks.com, toolboxtopics.com, & safety.cat.com/toolbox

Getting Caught

Have you ever tried to rip an old towel into rags & after straining without success, had to go looking for scissors? You've just witnessed a safe demonstration of the strength of some of today's fabrics. But thousands of workers aren't so lucky. Those who have gotten clothing caught in moving parts of a machine know that even if they had the strength to rip the material free, they never would have had time to prevent injury to themselves. Your hand can be pulled around a pulley in a fraction of a second. Loose clothing, ties, jewelry, & even human hair have become caught in machinery & caused horrific, often fatal injuries like these:

- A worker adjusting a backhoe's brakes got his jacket caught in a driveshaft & broke his neck.
 - A worker's dangling neck jewelry became entangled in moving gear. He had strung a piece of piano wire through his necklace so nobody could rip it off his neck. When the necklace became tangled, the worker was decapitated.
- Here are some tips for those working around equipment capable of entrapping parts of their bodies:
- Jewelry, especially dangling pieces, such as neck chains or bracelets, should never be worn around moving equipment. There's not only a danger of being drawn into moving parts, but also of electrocution.
 - Stuffing long hair under a collar or cap isn't good enough. It can work free & become entangled in equipment. Wear a hair net, or get your hair cut short.
 - Report all moving parts that are exposed & pose a threat.
 - Focus on the job & always be aware of the possibility of becoming entangled in moving machinery. Follow lockout/tagout procedures before performing any maintenance, adjustments, or attempting to free jammed materials. Machine guards must always be replaced.
 - Good housekeeping is a must. Imagine tripping over something you've left on the floor & rushing headlong into disaster.
 - Is there enough light so people can see danger lurking?
 - Never reach or step across moving equipment.

Anyone working around machinery needs to be properly trained about the potential hazards & what to do if a safeguard is missing, damaged, or doesn't provide enough protection. They must also wear personal protective equipment, such as goggles, to prevent injuries from items such as flying wood & metal fragments or splashed fluids.

True Story: Scalped

July, 2, 2012 was a young 25 year old woman's 6th day at a new job at an auto parts company. She went to clear out a machine she was operating to cut steel tubing when her long brown hair, which hung to midback & was pulled back into a ponytail for work, became tangled in the machine. She was pulled face first into the machine. The machine ripped her scalp from just above her eyebrows backward toward her neck. Screaming in pain & unable to reach the emergency stop button, a coworker shut down the machine. Paramedics were called, & it required 20 minutes to free her. She was taken to Akron General Hospital where surgeons reattached about 75% of her scalp, the remaining 25% was too mangled & will require plastic surgery.

This incident is still under investigation, but there are several things to take from this example. The answers for this particular case we won't know, but for us, as we go to work today, there are things we need to look at closely to prevent this from occurring to us: ▫ Do you have loose clothing or hair that can pull you into equipment? Take care of it. ▫ Do you have enough training on your 6th day of the job to know the right way to do things? Ask for help. ▫ Do you reach into moving equipment? Don't. ▫ Do you know the proper lockout procedures for your equipment? Learn them. ▫ Do all the interlocks work on your equipment guards? Check them. ▫ Do you need interlocks on doors or guards on your equipment? Let someone know.