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Real-World Communication Tactics to Energize Your Safety Program



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Frontline workers are the ones who deal with hazards from day to day, and it's because of them that you have a safety program.

But are you using their knowledge as effectively as you could? Communicating with your workers and getting them involved with safety planning can help make your company even safer.

Safety pros we've talked to have found a variety of ways to get their workers involved in the safety process. Here are some of the things that have worked for them:

1. Safety committees: Get all levels talking and sharing

Getting your workers involved in a safety committee is a great way to make safety a team effort, from management to the front line.

A busy business we know realized it needed a safety overhaul after a string of injuries and a fatality. Management decided to tap the



knowledge of frontline workers and make them the focal point of the safety overhaul.

Solution: The company formed a safety committee that was made up of a mix of management and frontline workers. It also invited other workers from different departments as guests, and together they revamped their training program.

Another example: A mid-sized company had problems getting workers interested in being part of a safety committee. It learned that workers felt they had an area of expertise and didn't want to get involved with other parts of the committee.

So it decided to make subcommittees focused on issues like equipment checks and procedures – special niche areas where people can contribute and get back expert, real-world advice.

Now workers are enthusiastic and willing to share their knowledge on the subcommittees.



2. Ask their opinion! It's free ... and priceless info

Believe it or not, simply asking your workers for their opinion is an easy way to get the safety conversation going! Too many companies forget this truism because people get busy and they forget to circle back to the important things.

Here's how some businesses say they've benefitted from getting employees' feedback:

- The safety leaders at Company A felt as though they were talking at their workers during training, not to them. The workers were bored and the safety message just wasn't getting through. So the safety managers came up with a new method where they'd ask workers' opinions after laying out a new procedure. Then the safety managers pass the workers' thoughts on to upper management. This has encouraged the workers to share their perspective and feel they have a voice.
- An OSHA inspection prompted Company B to make some changes to its machine guarding. The company decided that the best way to come up with a workable design for the changes was to have the engineers and machine operators sit down together

and discuss potential ideas. The company knew that getting their workers' input was vital because they'd be the ones dealing with the changes on a daily basis.

- Company C knew it had an issue with some of its PPE – standard safety glasses just weren't protecting its workers well enough. That's why the safety manager went out and found four potential upgrades. Then he let his workers test the different glasses and asked which ones they felt were most effective. Together they found a solution to the problem, helping injury rates drop significantly.

3. There's more than one way to improve safety – the real key is to try something

Sometimes finding out what works takes a little trial-and-error. These companies we talked with had their workers help turn not-so-great safety experiences into systems that really work:

- After the safety program at Company D failed, it decided to implement a safety coordinator program instead. Appointed safety coordinators are responsible for keeping an eye out for any hazards and for listening to workers' safety suggestions. Now the



safety manager reports getting a few great improvement ideas every month

- Company E felt as though its workers weren't really engaged in the safety process. Part of the problem was a lack of sharing ideas. The answer: Supervisors get workers together and have them write down safety hazards they see on a white board. The board is in an area where workers can see it often. This way, workers are more aware of risks and more willing to mention potential problems to management.
- When potential clients began turning away services from Company F because it wasn't safe enough, it knew things needed to change. Company leaders wanted a safety overhaul, and knew this would mean refocusing the safety culture and putting the workers in charge of safety. Now workers are encouraged to come forward with safety concerns, and the company makes it

a priority to fix the problems to the workers' standards. While a problem is being dealt with, the company communicates progress to its team members. Bonus: Workers have the power to shut down any job that they feel isn't safe.



4. Time for a conversation? Ways to make sure you're heard

Knowing the right thing to say to your workers about safe work habits can make all the difference between compliance and incidents. And for this to happen, understanding the motivations your workers might have to stay safe is key.

Here are some ways that other companies have been able to start a conversation with their workers about the importance of workplace safety:

A small manufacturer's employees felt asking for help made them look weak. In reality, not doing so was exposing them to danger.

To make inroads, the safety manager started talking with them about how many risks they were taking by not taking simple precautions, like using PPE. Then he talked with the workers about how their behavior could affect them at home as well.

His goal was to get them to see that if you ignore safety, you might get badly hurt, and if that happens, you won't be able to do the things you love outside of work. Doing so has led to a dramatic shift in safety attitudes. People “get” now that if they have a question, they're wrong not to ask.

Getting buy-in may come down to their wallets

Getting your supervisors in tune with safety is just as important as getting through to your frontline workers. So what do you say when supervisors and C-suite leaders aren't taking safety as seriously as you'd like?

- At Company G, supervisors weren't responding to the message, “Let's get our workers home safely.” A change in message was needed. Result: The safety manager started talking about how safety can affect the bottom line – and their paychecks, along with job security. This got the supervisors' attention, and they started paying more attention to safety.
- The safety manager at Company H couldn't get the Finance side of the company to understand the importance of reducing safety risks. He realized that he and the people in Finance

were essentially speaking two separate languages: His mind was on PPE and OSHA regs, and their minds were on return on investment or ROI. So he started to learn about how safety affected the business. When he went to these employees with a list of ways that safe work practices contributed to saving money, and not just lives, Finance and the C-Suite began to pay more attention.

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