Engage Your Employees in Safety

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What is Employee Engagement?

- There are many definitions

- "An "engaged employee" is one who is fully involved in, and enthusiastic about their work, and thus will act in a way that furthers their organization's interests." [1]

- Common themes emerge when comparing definitions:

"These themes include employees' satisfaction with their work and pride in their employer, the extent to which people enjoy and believe in what they do for work and the perception that their employer values what they bring to the table." [2]

- Synonymous with "morale"

Signs of a Disengaged Workforce

- Employees don't report minor injuries or hazards
- Low participation in safety committees and other safety-related meetings
- Lack of respect for the safety program; feeling that management is not serious about it
- Employees regularly break the safety rules if they think they won't get caught
- Safety professionals are viewed as "cops"
- Safety performance doesn't improve despite adequate OSHA compliance, leadership commitment, training etc.

Internal Justification for Disengagement

- Nobody asks me for my opinion
- This safety policy makes my job harder
- Management is just waiting to catch me violating a safety rule
- I've been saying we need to make this change for years; it's finally changing because of an accident
- Management violates the safety rules but wants us to follow them
- I reported a safety concern two months ago; nobody did anything about it
- Management just cares about productivity; they want us to work faster even if it is unsafe
- I have been working this way for 30 years and have never been hurt; I don't see the importance of safety

What Does Engagement have to do with Safety Performance?

- Studies show a significant positive correlation between safety performance and employee engagement
  - Meta-analysis by Gallup [3]
    - Compared work groups in top and bottom quartile of employee engagement
    - Looked at data from >125 organizations
    - Engaged business units had 62% fewer safety incidents than units with lower employee engagement

What Does Engagement have to do with Safety Performance?

- Management characteristic most predictive of good safety performance is a positive employee environment [4]
  - This includes respect for employees, open communication, employee involvement and participation
- Many examples in literature to support this correlation

What Does Engagement have to do with Safety Performance?

- Molson Coors example [2]
  - Saved $1.7M in safety costs during 2002 by strengthening employee engagement
  - Engaged employees:
    - Were five times less likely than nonengaged employees to have a safety incident
    - Were seven times less likely to have a lost-time incident
  - Average safety incident cost:
    - $392 (nonengaged)
    - $63 (engaged)

How Can Engagement be Improved?

1. Involve employees in workplace safety
2. Consider employee ideas
3. Ensure good communication
4. Give positive feedback
5. Respect employees and their ideas

Employee Involvement

- Employee engagement is directly correlated with the level of involvement that employees have in their work processes and activities [5]

- Employee involvement benefits everyone
    - Workers feel a sense of pride and ownership
    - Involved workers are more likely to comply
    - Management gets the benefit of the employees' extensive knowledge

Employee Involvement

- A critical part of any safety management system
  - OSHA VPP – Involve employees in safety and health management system in at least 3 meaningful, constructive ways [6]
  - OHSAS – Employees must participate in specific aspects of the safety management system [7]

Practical Ways to Involve Employees in Safety

- Discuss proposed workplace changes with affected employees before implementation
- Let employees sample PPE, hand tools, etc. before making a change
- Solicit employee ideas when developing JHA's, risk assessments, and solutions to hazards
- Encourage participation in safety meetings and emergency response teams

Practical Ways to Involve Employees in Safety *(cont.)*

- Encourage employee suggestions and give recognition
  - Formal or informal
- Invite employees to participate in incident investigations, workplace safety inspections, and behavior-based safety
- Hold regular shift huddle meetings and discuss safety; encourage employee comments
- Hold informal discussions with employees about safety

Considering Employee Ideas

- Actively seek safety suggestions and concerns from employees
- Address them in a timely manner and ensure resolution
- ALWAYS follow up with the employee
- Express your appreciation for their ideas
- Give them the credit

Ensuring Good Communication

- Communications must be clear and concise
    - Address anticipated situations and possible exceptions
    - Don't leave room for assumptions
- Explain to employees why the safety rules are in place
    - Even if you think the reason is obvious
    - Don't just refer to an OSHA standard or company policy; explain the hazard

Give Positive Feedback

- Random acts of recognition
  - Formal / informal
- Thank employees for safe work habits
- Behaviors that are followed by positive reinforcement will increase the likelihood of that behavior being repeated [8]

Respect

- Respect employees' ideas and concerns
- Don't be afraid to tell an employee that their idea cannot be implemented
  - Give valid reasons
- Treat employees respectfully, even when they violate a safety rule
  - Send the "I Care" message
  - Don't be the "Safety Cop"
- Keep confidentiality when requested
- Don't interrupt them during important tasks

Conclusion

- Employee engagement can be a powerful tool to improve safety performance and other business measures
- Engaging and involving employees will benefit both the employees and business
  - Regardless of method used
- Get your employees involved and excited about safety!

Questions?

References

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