SAFETY SOLUTIONS

BUILDING A SAFETY CULTURE

A strong safety culture can be a company's greatest asset, but the lack thereof can prove to be an insurmountable obstacle. The question that contractors continually ask is "How can I do that at my company?" Chances are you've already done it—you just haven't applied it to safety.

It benefits every business to implement a culture of product quality. In many cases, this is done by **identifying** hindrances to quality, such as cost-prohibitive materials or perhaps a labor pool with communication barriers. Then, a company **develops** strategies to overcome the obstacles. Companies **teach** managers to overcome the aforementioned obstacles. Success or failure is determined by **reviewing** the process to ensure changes either meet or exceed previous standards of quality. Finally, companies **reward** managers who perform with raises and bonuses. This simplifies the process a great deal but the general concept is clear.

You may have noticed several key words in bold print. These keys to success can be modified to meet the needs of almost any problem in any organization, no matter what product or service is provided.

Here, they have been modified to map the critical steps needed to building a safety culture:

Identify	=	**Hazard Identification**
Develop	=	**Safety Policy Development**
Teaching	=	**Training**
Reviewing	=	**Inspection**
Rewarding	=	**Encouragement**

Ideally, you would start at Hazard Identification, but it isn't necessarily required. It is, however, the logical first step.

Now, let's review each step:

Step 1: Hazard Identification—Being the logical first step, it is the responsibility of each business to review its work process(es) to determine if people are being exposed to hazards. I am always a proponent of hiring a third party to help administrate a safety program. Many times, as industry professionals, it's easy to walk past a hazard you've been dealing with for many years; you don't even realize you are at risk.

Step 2: Safety Policy Development—The standard protocol for protecting people from hazards is to: 1) look to engineer out the hazard; 2) apply administrative controls; and 3) implement the use of personal protective equipment. I have often been surprised by employees' ability to strategize effective engineering and administrative controls; therefore, I strongly recommend seeking input from employees to develop protective methods. A critical component of a safety culture is to have employee-level buy-in. There is no better way to create buy-in than to encourage employee ownership of the program.

Step 3: Training—The most efficient way to develop a training program is to use the hazard identifications and the developed safety policy made in the previous steps. Training needs to be conducted in various environments and forms, from formalized class work to job site, a mock job site, or practical training. The training needs to be relevant, topical, timely, and concise. You can do it yourself; hire consultants; invite vendors and manufacturers; or, ideally, use all three methods. The more ways you communicate your expectations to your people, the more they will retain and use the subject matter.

Step 4: Inspection—This phase of the cycle draws on the previous steps and affects all other phases. During this phase, you are evaluating the effectiveness of your training and looking to see if people are responding. You are also conducting a hazard assessment. It is a real-life, real-time look into the work. Inspection can also be used as a training tool. When you discover an issue that needs to be corrected, it is an invaluable opportunity to show employees how to protect themselves and others. It is almost impossible to replicate this in a classroom. It also provides an opportunity to encourage the use of proper safety procedures.

Step 5: Encouragement—Encouragement comes in many forms: positive, negative, monetary, verbal, written, individual, and group. There are many ways to let a person know whether or not he or she has responded to training. How you do it is up to you, but the point is YOU HAVE TO DO IT. Every organization is different, so what works for one group may not be as effective for another. You'll have to find out what works best for your situation. If your people don't know they are doing things wrong, they'll continue to do them. If you don't encourage good behavior, employees can fall into bad habits.

A business can stumble by looking at this as a five-step plan to building a safety culture. In reality, it is a synergistic cycle; no step can be skipped without negatively affecting the effectiveness of the other four steps. You can't get to Step 5 and then dust off your hands and stop trying to grow the culture. Growing a safety culture is like growing a garden—you plant a seed, care for the seed, watch it grow, and then reap the benefits. However, if you stop caring by not watering and weeding, the garden will be overrun with weeds and the plants will wither and die.

Don't let your organization's safety culture wither and die!

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