



How a “Can Do” Attitude Affects Safety



People are more likely to actively care when they are in a good mood and optimistic about the future.

SELF – CONFIDENCE

“I am valuable.”

How do you feel about yourself? Research has shown that people with high self-esteem report fewer negative emotions and less depression than those with low self-esteem, and they handle life’s stressors with more confidence and competence. Most importantly, the better we feel about ourselves, the more willing we are to actively care for the welfare of others. Actually, common sense tells us people will not act to protect others from personal injury if they do not perceive themselves as being a worthwhile individual. Our common sense also informs us of ways to increase our own and others’ self-esteem. Consider, for example, the following A-words that reflect certain types of interpersonal conversations that can boost a person’s self-esteem: Accept, Actively listen, Agree, Appreciate, Acknowledge, Approve, Ask, Attend, Avoid criticizing, and argue less.

SELF-EFFICACY

“I can do it.”

Self-efficacy is more situational specific than self-esteem and refers to a person’s sense of competence at a particular task at a particular point in time. Thus, job-specific feedback directly impacts self-efficacy. When individuals believe they are doing worthwhile work well, their self-efficacy increases, along with their willingness to actively care. Here we’re talking about personal experiences that enable a person to see their achievements. Sometimes these success stories occur naturally, as when the artist, scholar, and tradesman view the positive results of their on-going behavior. We call this “intrinsic reinforcement.” Effective safety leaders point out the inherent positive consequences of a group’s injury-prevention efforts, thereby increasing the self-efficacy of the participants.





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PERSONAL CONTROL

“I’m in control.”

The academic term “locus of control” refers to a general perception regarding the location of forces controlling a person’s life internal vs. external. The internal outlook reflects a belief in direct personal control over a certain situation, as opposed to the external belief in chance, luck, or uncontrollable fate. In the internal state, individuals are captains of their ship, whereas, in the external state, people believe they are victims of circumstances beyond their control. The perception of “choice” is closely related to belief in personal control. In other words, whenever you increase one’s perception of choice (for example, by offering options rather than mandates), you enhance the perception of control, ownership, and self-directed commitment. These people states, in turn, contribute to an actively-caring disposition.



“If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else.”

*Booker T.
Washington*

OPTIMISM

“I expect the best.”

Optimism refers to the learned expectation that life events will turn out well. People who expect the best benefit from the self-fulfilling prophecy. They start with an expectation of success and then work diligently to make that positive outcome happen. In contrast, a pessimistic prophecy can depreciate a person’s perception of personal control, self-efficacy, and even self-esteem. Empirical research has demonstrated increases in both optimism and helping behavior following such simple events as finding money in a coin return, accepting a cookie, listening to soothing music, being on a winning football team, and receiving genuine behavior-based recognition. Bottom line: People are more likely to actively care when they are in a good mood and optimistic about the future.





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BELONGINGNESS

“We are family.”

How can a sense of belongingness or interdependence be cultivated in corporate culture? I’ve heard a variety of proposals from discussion groups, including 1) Increase team-building exercises, group goal-setting and feedback sessions, self-managed or self-directed work teams and group celebrations for process and outcome achievements; 2) Decrease the frequency of top-down directives and “quick-fix” programs; 3) Teach relationship-building communication strategies throughout the workforce, especially to the first-line supervisors.



When resources, opportunities, and talents enable team members to assert, “We can make a difference,” feelings of belongingness occur naturally. This leads to synergy, with the group achieving far more than possible from individuals working solo. More importantly, the interdependent attitudes, behaviors, and achievements strengthen a family-oriented culture wherein actively caring for safety is a welcomed obligation.

Ref: E. Scott Gellar; <http://www.ishn.com/articles/psychology-of-safety-the-actively-caring-disposition>

