The Science Behind Safety

RAMP RISK ASSESSMENT MANAGEMENT & PREVENTION

In order to maintain safety at a level that prevents injuries, we first have to work on dealing with the emotional issues so the focus is on good decision-making. Realize that safety is both art and science and needs to be treated as such. The "art" is about dealing with people—establishing accountabilities, holding people responsible, and building trust. The "science" of safety is about dealing with behavioral and technical processes.

Take action for a Safe Workplace:

Safety is an important topic that needs to be discussed

Hazard control is an example of a process that includes both behavioral and technical aspects.

The technical process of safety involves identifying the hazard, abating or controlling it, engineering so it no longer exists, or changing work processes to include the use of protective or personal protective equipment. When a hazard control has been established, practiced, and proven over time, workers and leaders accept it as normal, and it becomes "common sense" safety. Sometimes acceptance of a new rule or work practice seems to take a while and often, people don't even understand their own resistance to the process. The Million Dollar Question: Bob, a safety committee chairperson, works in an industry where workers are required to wear protective personal equipment (PPE). When people don't wear the appropriate PPE, the results can be devastating because workers are exposed to the hazards of high voltage electricity.

As Bob explains: "We had someone get hurt last month because he wasn't wearing sleeves with his high voltage rubber gloves. We all know that it's a good work practice to wear the sleeves, so why doesn't everyone just do it? Why don't they get it?"

"Why don't workers get it?" That's the million-dollar question. Experience shows that acceptance of new rules, regulations, and work practices happen faster when workers are engaged in the process.

Throw It On The Wall To See What Sticks: The key, therefore, is to get employees involved. Think about it…What would happen if workers in our organization listed the hazards they face every day, and then identified and quickly adopted a solution without emotion? An organization's ability to function without emotion and make correct decisions depends on the availability of internal leadership.

Safety doesn't happen by accident

We can use the following three steps to guide our workers and leaders to discuss the "best practices" with regard to hazard control:

1. Have every work team meet (a huddle or team meeting can be used for this) and facilitate a session by asking this question: What hazards do our team face each day that can cause injury to people and damage to equipment? Then list each hazard on the far left side of flip chart paper. The work team could easily fill up more than a dozen sheets.
2. Next, ask the team: What rules and safe work practices do we use to prevent injury to people and damage to equipment? (We can refer to safety manuals, etc.) Write the responses next to each hazard on the list. Make sure everyone participates and understands the controls.
3. Finally, ask the team: Which of these controls can I place a check next to that we will always do? Most of the time the response will be… All of them!

Discuss this last question at length with the team and confirm that they understand that always using these controls will provide a 99.9% probability that nobody gets hurt.

Take Action For A Safe Workplace: Safety is an important topic that needs to be discussed.

Everyone must get involved in the discussion and take action to ensure that nobody gets hurt.

When we do, we're likely to find the answer to that million-dollar question.

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