**Engaging Employees in Workplace Safety**

Even sites that are OSHA compliant and maintain adequate safety programs struggle with incidents and injuries because they do not have employees that are engaged in workplace safety. Studies show that engaged employees greatly improve safety in the workplace.

**What is employee engagement?**

William Kahn, academician and recognized founder of the concept of engagement, described “personal engagement” as “harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles, which occurs when three psychological needs are met:

- personal feelings of meaningfulness (one is valued and appreciated)
- psychological safety (one can do and work without fear of negative consequences)
- availability (one has the physical and mental resources without distractions to engage at work).

**Benefits of an engaged workforce**

Research has shown that increased work-related engagement results in benefits to both the individual and the organization in many aspects, from safety and worker health to customer satisfaction, performance and profits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Benefits</th>
<th>Organizational Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher job satisfaction and commitment</td>
<td>Improved customer service and loyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life satisfaction and lower levels of ill health</td>
<td>Improved sales and profits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer absences</td>
<td>Increased worker loyalty and retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer safety issues</td>
<td>Reduced absenteeism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher performance ratings</td>
<td>Improved quality with fewer errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase mental resilience</td>
<td>Increased teamwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of belonging and achievement</td>
<td>Increased employee morale and well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and professional growth</td>
<td>Alignment of personal and corporate value</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Gallup’s 2016 study, which examined more than 82,000 business units and 1.8 million employees in 230 organizations, across 49 industries and in 73 countries, shows that businesses with engagement scores in the top quarter of Gallup's database have 70% fewer safety incidents compared with businesses in the bottom quarter.

**Hazards of a disengaged workforce**

A recent study from Queen’s School of Business indicates “disengaged workers have 37 percent higher absenteeism, 49 percent more accidents, and 60 percent more errors and defects.”

**Common symptoms of a disengaged workforce:**

- Employees don’t report minor injuries or hazards
- Low participation in safety committees and safety meetings
- Lack of respect and “buy in” for safety programs and the feeling that management is not serious about them
- Employees regularly break or disregard safety rules and procedures and think they won’t get “caught”
- Safety professionals and managers are viewed as “cops”
- Safety performance does not improve despite OSHA and safety program compliance and training

**Internal justification for a disengaged workforce:**

- 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
Driving Engagement, Excellence, Accountability and Safety
When workers are committed to a standard of excellence in all they do, it’s natural for them to adhere to best practices that prevent safety incidents. When employees are dedicated to quality, they go the extra mile to do things right the first time.

By listening to workers, employees feel their opinions count. Front-line employees closest the action offer a unique perspective must be respected and valued by management. Leaders should encourage employees to watch for hazards and should make it easy for them to share their feedback and concerns. Most importantly, leaders must act on the information they receive to mitigate safety concerns and demonstrate to employees that their opinions matter.

Management must hold employees accountable for their actions, but approach concerns from a place of caring and the safety of the employee rather than discipline. By holding employees accountable, leaders can develop a workforce that makes smart decisions throughout the day and promotes a culture of workplace safety.

Define and communicate the purpose of the company. This makes employees feel their job is important. Engaged organizations maintain a purpose-driven culture and ensure that employees understand and identify with that purpose. When workers embrace the mission of an organization and connect with that purpose both personally and professionally, they are more likely to think "big picture" in all areas of their work and are approach their work with thoughtfulness and attention to detail, which contributes to a culture of safety.

As the 5th most dangerous industry in the country, with roughly 1 manager for every 17 front-line workers, even the most safety conscious managers have little hope of maintaining a safety culture without employee engagement