

Gauging Leadership Participation in Safety Initiatives

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Abstract

Many articles have been written regarding safety leadership and the importance of management participation in health and safety initiative at work. It had always been a strong area of interest to me and I would generally spend quite a lot of time reviewing much of these publications in an attempt to come up with the best formula that might suit the organization I was working with at the time. This article provides you with a quick way of evaluating leadership participation in health and safety.

Introduction

Spending many years with numerous multinational establishments as an employee, contractor, auditor or consultant gave me quite an insight into what some of these companies were doing to better their safety systems and to ensure they get the collective participation in health and safety initiatives that ultimately created better safety cultures.

It did not take much time to figure out that building that culture was based on more individuals being involved with safety programs and initiatives. Employees were more likely to get involved if they saw their supervisors and managers being involved,

managers participated and showed more engagement when their executives and peers took the lead on safety issues. Witnessing changes in leadership, inconsistency in applying safety programs, also showed how strong initiatives could very quickly come to a halt as a result of a lack of participation. With time, this is ultimately followed by an increase in injury rates.

As a new employee first joining any organization, It generally takes a while to get a good understanding of a safety culture, reviewing and assessing the following points, however, can provide you with a quick way of evaluating leadership participation in health and safety:

1. Visible Health and Safety Policies

Although a clear health and safety does not always indicate a strong safety performance, having a clear statement signed by top company executive shows that the intention is there. Having the policy framed and displayed in the corridors, operational sites, and employee offices does create a strong message that this is something that needs to be taken seriously.

2. Health and Safety Reporting Structure

The organizational chart gives a strong indication of how health and safety is viewed

within a company. A health and safety director or manager reporting to the CEO or the top person within the organization is a good indication. Having multiple layers of reporting between the top safety person and the top person within the organization, not so good.

3. Safety Walkthroughs

A very good “walk the talk” example showing leaders walking on the shop floor with members of their teams to only focus on health and safety issues. These should be scheduled in advance (normally monthly) and consistency is key! Having top management turn out every month has an enormous effect on the overall employee participation and reporting safety matters.

4. Safety Meetings & Committees

Although their presence is vital, it is normally recommended that management does not take the lead in such meetings and let active employees run these programs. This is another powerful tool that enhances participation and allows all employees to openly talk about safety matters.

I have been in ones that started pretty awkward with not many people wanting to say much, however, given time, open discussions started flowing and much was achieved as a result of these meetings.

5. Monthly safety reports discussed on an executive level.

I am almost certain that every safety department in any company in the world would be required to submit some kind of report on its activities or the overall health

and safety performance of the organization. The question is, who actually reads it?

Setting some time aside every month or every quarter to review these reports, provide recommendations and a way forward on an executive level is normally a strong indication of management participation in health and safety matters.

6. “Safety Moments” in high-level meetings

The finance manager has prepared his slides for his upcoming departmental meeting and before he starts discussing the facts and figures for the month, his first slide comes up and it says “Safety Moment”. He goes on to discuss a near miss he had when he was very lucky not to jam his fingers in the heavy drawers the department uses to place their archived documents.

Some organizations plan fixed topics for their safety moments and change them every week, others just allow for the time at the beginning of every meeting and ask one of the attendees to say something. All in all when managed and encouraged by top management, gives yet another good indication of participation in encouraging safety discussions and ensuring it is a priority and the first thing always discussed.

Executive management are key persons in an enterprise to design and improve the working conditions and influence overall safety participation within their organization. They plan, lead, coordinate and control activities. They are the ones influencing working conditions and overall decisions relating to the work environment. Setting an example for the workforce by showing active participation and interest in some of the discussed

programs is key to developing an overall safety culture within the organization.

Conclusion

Safety leadership is most definitely a condition for success. Any approach an organization may take will only prove fruitful if it is supported by the management. Strong and visible leadership and engaged managers at all levels should provide direction to any new initiatives. This makes it clear to everyone that safety and health are key focus areas within the company

References

- Safety and Health for Engineers by Roger L. Brauer
- Safety Professional reference and Study Guide- W. David Yates