

TITLE: 1702 SAFETY LEADERSHIP:

An Essential Safety Element

LENGTH: 13 MINUTES

PRODUCTION YEAR: 2017

PROGRAM SYNOPSIS:

Every successful safety program is built on a foundation of essential elements. One such element is "Safety Leadership." Safety Leadership can be defined as "the influence of a person's words or actions on the safety decisions made by others." In this program, we will see how good safety leadership helps everyone make better safety decisions, while also illustrating how poor safety leadership can quickly undermine the entire safety process. Human nature tempts us to make a job easier or faster by making unsafe choices. The consistent presence of positive safety leadership helps all workers make wise safety decisions. It's important to note that safety leadership comes from everyone, including the newest employee, the experienced worker, the front line supervisor and even the plant manager. Safety leaders speak up and do not condone unsafe acts, nor do they take shortcuts to simplify or hasten a job. Effective safety leadership must also include discipline and consistent rules enforcement from managers and supervisors. It's also important to understand that Safety Leaders don't have to be vocal. The quiet leadership exhibited by workers who always follow the safety rules also has a powerful effect.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES: After watching the program, the participant should be able to explain the following

- What challenges are presented by our human nature;
- Why the consistent presence of good safety leadership is so important;
- Why discipline and consistent rules enforcement are required for effective safety leadership;
- How poor safety leadership erodes an organization's safety culture;
- Why it is important to set good safety examples;
- What the traits of a good safety leader are.

PROGRAM OUTLINE:

THE CHALLENGES OF OUR HUMAN NATURE

• Our human nature presents a constant challenge when it comes to safe behavior. Each day, we are faced with multiple choices and decisions.

Quotes from Workers:

- "This procedure is going to take forever. I'm never going to get out of here today."
- "These steel-toed boots are so ugly. It's ridiculous to have to put them on to spend five minutes out on the shop floor."
- "Man, it's hot! I don't want to put that gear back on."
- "You got that right, man. This is not designed for comfort that's for sure."
- Our human nature tends to lead us towards choices that are faster, easier and more immediately pleasurable.
- This presents a particular challenge when it comes to making safety decisions because the safe choice is typically not faster, not easier or more pleasurable. In other words, choosing safety often seems to go against our basic human instincts. This is why, in the absence of positive safety leadership, it is more likely that we will make unsafe choices.

Co-workers' Conversation:

- "You know what? I'm not going to do it. I'm going without," a worker says in regards to his PPE.
- "Yeah, you know what? Me too, what's the worst that's going to happen?"
- "We're probably safer not wearing it anyway. Maybe we won't get a heat stroke this way."
- "You got that right."
- "It's ridiculous to have to put them on to spend five minutes out on the shop floor," says a worker talking about wearing steel-toed boots.
- "Yeah, plus by the time you put them on, you could have already gone out there and come back."
- "That's a good point. I think it's more efficient not to wear them."
- "I'm never going to get out of here today. I know what I'm doing. I'm just going to get it done and get out of here," a worker says in reference to performing a lockout procedure.
- We often fall into the trap of justifying unsafe choices based on comfort, efficiency or even our level of skill or knowledge.

THE CONSISTENT PRESENCE OF GOOD SAFETY LEADERSHIP

• Fortunately, the pitfalls of our base instincts can be overcome by the consistent presence of good safety leadership. This is why safety leadership is so important and why the safety culture is greatly improved when all workers learn how to become good safety leaders.

Co-workers' Conversation:

- "Whoa, whoa, whoa, hey where's your gear?"
- "Man, it's hot! We're good without it."
- Yeah, it's going to be fine. Nothing's going to happen; nothing ever happens."

- “Hey man, it only takes once for something to go bad.”

WILLINGNESS TO SPEAK UP

- One important example of safety leadership is when a co-worker is willing to speak up to directly stop an unsafe act.

Co-workers’ Conversation:

- “Look, we’re all grown men we can make our own decisions.”
- “I know you’re grown men. I also know that you’re both pretty smart. That’s why I know you’ll make the right call and put your gear back on.”
- “Well, I guess its not that hot.”
- “Right. Come on, gear up. Don’t forget your face shield and your gloves.”
- “I was just hot. It took Roger saying something about it to make me realize the mistake I was about to make. I’m glad he did.”

SAFETY LEADERS DON’T HAVE TO BE VOCAL

- Safety Leaders don’t have to be vocal. The quiet leadership exhibited by workers who always follow the safety rules also has a powerful effect.

Worker’s Thoughts:

- “What am I doing? Johnny’s doing his lockout, like always. Where’s that lock?”
- “I really wanted to get out of there a little bit early, you know, but when I saw Johnny doing his lockout, it really reminded me that I needed to do mine. Of course, I’ll never tell him that.”

DISCIPLINE AND CONSISTENT RULES ENFORCEMENT

Co-workers’ Conversation:

- “Whoa, whoa, Veronica. You’re not coming out here with those fancy shoes on.”
- “But I’m only going to be out here for just a minute, promise.”
- “No, no, no, you’re not even going to be here that long. Because you’re going to go back to your cubicle, putting your steel-toed boots on.”
- “But it’s more time effective if I just come out here.”
- “No, I don’t care about whatever excuse you’ve concocted to convince yourself it’s okay; it’s not okay.”
- “But I’ve...”
- “And you’ve been warned!”
- Effective safety leadership must also include discipline and consistent rules enforcement from managers and supervisors.
- “Or I will see you at a disciplinary conference with your supervisor and the plant manager.”

AVOIDING NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

- Wishing to avoid negative consequences is also a powerful influence on human behavior.

Worker Quote:

- “When he called me out in front of everybody else, mostly I was embarrassed. I brought it on myself. It’s his job to keep everybody safe and he did his job, but I’ll never make that mistake again.”
- We have just seen three examples of good safety leadership that works with human nature to encourage safe behavior.
- Speaking up to co-workers about unsafe acts triggers our instinct to want to please others and to also receive positive reinforcement for our actions.
- When supervisors provide immediate corrective action to rule violations, it plays directly into our desire to avoid negative consequences.
- When other workers consistently set good examples, it creates an environment where safe behavior is the norm, allowing peer pressure to help shape positive safety choices.
- It’s important to understand that we all set examples for others by our actions, good or bad. When it comes to safety leadership, our actions always speak louder than our words.

POOR SAFETY LEADERSHIP ERODES THE SAFETY CULTURE

- When upper level management ignores the safety rules they require for everyone else, it sends mixed signals about the overall commitment to safety.

Co-workers’ Conversation:

- “Oh look. Here comes the plant manager. I wonder what’s up?”
- “Man, that dude looks like a fish out of water every time he comes out here. Notice he doesn’t bother to wear any of the safety gear we have to wear!”
- “Yeah. I guess safety’s not the most important thing that we do after all.”
- When experienced workers use their skill level as an excuse to disregard safe work practices, it gives other workers an excuse to follow suit.
- “Uh, what about the gloves and the face shield? Aren’t we supposed to wear them?”

- “Is that what they told you in your training?”
- “Uh, yeah.”
- “Then you’d better do it. I know what I’m doing.”
- Condoning unsafe acts when productivity or profitability is at stake can literally destroy the credibility of the safety effort.

Conversation Between Worker and Supervisor:

- “Hey Charlie, don’t forget to put on that harness before you go up in that thing.”
- “I left it back at the shop. Processing’s down and I’ve got to get them up and running.”
- “Processing is down? Processing pays the bills! Next time just make sure you have it on alright?”
- “I will; I will; I will next time.”
- The manager featured in this scenario did a great job of teaching us how not to be a safety leader. This person reinforced unsafe behavior by not only ignoring it, but actually condoning it.
- “Next time just make sure you have it on, alright?”
- The guy in the lift now understands that wearing a harness isn’t really necessary.
- “I will, I will, I will next time.”
- Even worse, word is now spreading through the facility that when you have real work to do, the safety rules just don’t apply.

Co-workers’ Conversation:

- “What’s up with that?”
- “I don’t know, man. I mean, I guess processing is so important Charlie doesn’t have to be safe.”
- “I have to be safe; you have to be safe.”
- “Yeah.”
- “I’m wearing my harness.”
- “For real.”
- “I just don’t get this place man; I mean, when is safety important and when is it not?”
- Just that fast, a moment of poor safety leadership can begin eroding your facility’s safety culture.

SETTING GOOD SAFETY EXAMPLES

- Once unsafe acts and poor safety examples take root, they can quickly spread to others and destroy the safety culture. All workers can help prevent this by striving to always set a good safety example and make sure their actions match up to the safety words being used.
- Remember, all workers, including you, are safety leaders because your actions influence others. Make sure your actions support the safety message.

Workers’ Quotes:

- “Yeah, it’s a little thing, but I like to set an example for the other workers around here. I guess because I’ve been here so long that, you know, I’ve seen what can happen.”
- “I’ve seen injuries that I wish I never saw. So yeah, I think it’s very important that we all do our part to keep each other safe around here.”
- “I know we’re supposed to wear our face shield and ear plugs in the fab shop, but that day I guess I just wasn’t feeling it. When I saw the other guys wearing their gear, it kind of reminded me how important it is. I guess we all just need a reminder sometimes.”
- This is why safety leadership is so important and why the safety culture is greatly improved when all workers learn how to become good safety leaders.
- Let’s take another look at two of our examples and see how the safety process is improved when good safety leadership is put into practice.

Co-workers’ Conversation:

- “Oh look. Here comes the plant manager I wonder what’s up?”
- “Man, that dude looks like a fish out of water every time he comes out here. but at least he wears his safety gear.”
- “Yeah, he’s alright, as long as we don’t let him try to operate any power tools.”
- “When our plant manager wears his safety gear on our shop floor, that’s important to us. That means that this safety stuff is really important and that we’re all in it together, so that nobody gets hurt.”
- “Uh, what about the gloves and the face shield? Aren’t we supposed to wear them? Is that what they told you in your training?”
- “Uh, yeah.”
- “Then we’d better do that. I know what I’m doing, but even I can be wrong every now and then, so I need to be reminded. Thanks. You finish up here. I’ll go get my PPE.”

TRAITS OF A GOOD SAFETY LEADER

Worker’s Quote:

- “At first I was hesitant to tell Mr. Ernie about the PPE, just because he knows much more than me. But after he admitted that he was wrong and that he was glad I reminded him, man I felt good. It just goes to show you that safety really is a team effort and that we should all be watching out for each other all of the time.”

- That's a good point. An important aspect of leadership is not only being willing to speak up, but also being willing to listen to the input of others.
- All workers should learn and then emulate the traits of good safety leaders. Good safety leaders practice what they preach. Their actions match their words.
- Good safety leaders put a stop to unsafe acts right away. They do not look the other way.
- Good safety leaders do not compromise safety to save time or make a job easier, but remember, you don't have to be outspoken to be a powerful safety leader.
- The quiet influence of everyday workers consistently following safety rules creates an environment where safety is the norm and other workers more easily follow suit.
- This is why safety leadership is so important and why the safety culture is greatly improved when all workers become good safety leaders.