



Safety Coaching

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Let's talk about safety coaching. The first thing that I want to admit is that safety coaching is not easy and does not come naturally to me, nor I suspect to many of you.

Here is one tool for your safety toolbox: Try having a short conversation that involves engaging the employee's brain. Psychology plays a large role in convincing employees to make safe choices. In retrospect, this makes sense. We know plenty of psychology has gone into advertising, so it stands to reason that there would be just as much in safety training.

Think about it, advertising is the art of getting you to want something that you may not even know existed before seeing the ad. Safety training is convincing the employee to change their actions (making habits) that often (in their mind) is not as convenient or second nature.

Psychology tells us that yelling, ranting & threatening rarely has a lasting impact on behavior. Sometimes it even has the opposite effect by building up resentment and drives unsafe acts to become the action of choice. Probably we all have tried this. I am not saying that you should not yell and possibly be aggressive with your efforts when you witness an unfolding action that you think will end badly soon. In this case, yelling could be very appropriate.

For the long term, non-emergency coaching, try these six steps for successfully changing the way your employee thinks while they are working. When you read down this list, you might think that having a simple conversation about an employee's action is too simple to work, but it is all about changing how the employee's brain processes the behavior.

Let me explain. When you tell your employee to use three points of contact when climbing in or out of a piece of equipment, that does not engage his brain at all. The employee probably can finish this catchphrase for you but yet never do it. Try this instead - when you see the same employee climbing out of a piece of equipment, say, "Chip, why do we use three points of contact when climbing in or out of a piece of equipment"? This engages the employee's brain, and even when it is trivial to answer this, it will have a lasting impact on the way he thinks

about climbing on equipment.

But, don't stop there; ask a follow-up question like "Why does three points of contact work?" Again, engaging the employee's brain. Leave with a positive thought like, "keep up the good work using three points of contact."

This seems like a trivial conversation, but done consistently your employees will make the right choices without thinking about them because their brains will be making them subconsciously.

Here are the six steps with some explanation:

1. Coach in the moment. Don't let a good opportunity go by.
2. Go to the employee, walk up to them (do not make them come to you). Subconsciously this tells the employee that they and their safety are important to you.
3. Start by stating the action that you saw. "Hey, Chip, I saw you climbing out of the cab of your equipment."
4. Ask an open-ended question (not giving

the employee an option to use just yes or no). Use what, why, or how to start the inquiry. "Chip, why do we use 3 points of contact?"

5. Short conversation. Ask two or more questions but try not to let the conversation go longer than four minutes.

6. End on a positive note. Leaving all with a good feeling, this will improve the next interaction you have with this employee.

Try to do this often and on different topics. Challenge yourself to have this interaction with all of your employees. Make a tally sheet or even a spreadsheet that tracks these events & safety issues.

Last thought, beware of extinction. It did not end well for the dinosaurs, and it won't end well for your safety program if you take your eye off safety. If you hammer on a particular topic, you will get results but don't forget to circle back to this topic every few weeks to keep the employees accessing their brains for safety. Safety training is like a load of wood; they need to be delivered every day, and you don't get paid until it has been delivered.

