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THE MANAGER'S SAFETY PLAYBOOK:

5 WAYS TO ENGAGE MID-LINE MANAGERS IN SAFETY

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INTRODUCTION

Being a manager is challenging under the best of circumstances. Managers provide the first line of defense in handling safety issues, communicating organizational priorities and values, and building relationships with individual team members. They act as conduits between senior leaders and employees—conveying mandates and needs both up and down the organizational ladder. And they process multiple priorities with limited time in which to administer them. Clearly, engaging managers effectively in safety requires more than a general charge to "support safety." Organizations need to define specific activities that can be integrated with the manager's other tasks and demands, while not compromising their effectiveness as organizational leaders.

This discussion defines the ways organizations can motivate managers to become better safety leaders while eliminating exposures to injury across the workforce.

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Understand — and Articulate — the Manager's Role in Safety

The first step to engaging managers in safety is **clearly defining the role you want them to undertake**. The manager's role in safety is to establish and enforce expectations regarding safety. Foremost among these is life-saving rules—those rules that directly apply to fatalities and serious injuries. Managers must know when and how to use discipline to enforce rules and must understand the role of behavior in safety—specifically how behavior relates to equipment, conditions, and systems in injury causation. Managers are responsible for tracking safety performance and maintaining alignment within the organization around the safety objective. They must also understand the concepts of exposure and potential, which change our orientation from retrospective to prospective.

How Managers Lead Safety:

Get the Right Data

It's common to focus on outcome measures (e.g., injury rates), but **if managers aren't also tracking leading indicators (like exposures and potential), they can't effectively manage safety**—they can only react when something goes wrong. One strategy is to measure the percentage of safe behaviors performed and the number of safe work permit jobs. This gives an upstream picture of the exposures people are facing, and the areas managers need to focus on first.

Resource Wisely

Managers must be able to **recognize and react appropriately to the difference between exposures** with the potential to cause fatalities and life-altering injuries as compared to those that have lesser potential. It's a mistake to apply an equal amount of resources to preventing potential sprains as you would falls from height. This can result in serious exposures going ignored or too much time spent investigating incidents with no likelihood of causing major injury.

Be a Leader for Safety

Managers advance the organisation's safety commitment by *walking* the talk. They build stronger performance by encouraging open dialogue among teams and collaborative problem solving on how best to complete tasks safely. **They model the right behaviors, so they don't unintentionally undermine the safety message and goals.**

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"When managers place the ownership of safety solely on the shoulders of workers, it is an abdication of leadership responsibility."

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Create Alignment Around Your Safety Objectives

Managers are critically positioned to maintain organizational alignment around safety objectives. Through feedback to reinforce what's desired and correct what isn't, managers impact specific individuals and groups, and through safety communications, managers influence the organization more broadly. As the representatives of upper management, managers convey the company's value for safety by what they do and say—**and how they lead**.

How Managers Create Alignment:

Managers Own Safety

Managers have a responsibility to create a physical work environment and culture where the employees **are empowered to work safely and are motivated to watch out for one another**. When managers place the ownership of safety solely on the shoulders of workers, it is an abdication of leadership responsibility.

Set Clear Goals and Expectations

Aligning the organization around safety requires **clearly defining the safety goals and expectations for everyone, at all levels**. Managers need to be responsible for communicating safety priorities, supporting safety leaders and programs, overseeing audits, and removing hazards.

Evaluate Performance

Keeping people on track with safety objectives **requires a shared view of performance and what it takes to succeed**. This means ongoing and objective evaluation of performance relative to established goals and expectations. By regularly observing and communicating with employees, managers learn what they need to give specific and actionable feedback.

Set and Apply Clear Consequences

Consequences are the last resort in aligning people with safety objectives. **Effective consequences are transparent, well understood, and consistently applied** for performance relative to safety goals.

"Good action plans avoid the extremes of goals dictated by one's boss in a vacuum on one end and leaving it up to the individual without other input on the other."

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Build Effective Action Plans

Meaningful and effective action plans begin with a vision. They define the activities and initiatives to be used in the coming year to identify and control safety exposures, and link those activities to specific goals and measurable outcomes. **Objectives should be expressed in concrete and measurable terms** that keep in mind how and what is being done to build the desired culture. Each action plan should establish a reliable tracking mechanism and schedule regular check-ins, so managers can ascertain progress against the goals.

How Managers Action Plan:

Define Action Plans Collaboratively

Good action plans reflect the mutual objectives of the individual and manager. This means avoiding the extremes of goals dictated by one's boss in a vacuum on one end and leaving it up to the individual without other input on the other.

Follow Up on Progress

After establishing a goal, managers need to regularly follow up on how workers are doing. If a goal is established and never discussed, it's easy for people to conclude that the goal is there simply for "cosmetic" reasons. On the other hand, if the manager checks in on progress, it's clear that the goal is important to the organization—and to the individual's performance.

What Managerial Goals Look Like

Managers can incorporate into their goals **actions that ensure teams and frontline supervisors are preforming safety effectively**. For example:

Conduct a weekly review of jobs with the highest safety hazards and discuss how exposure is managed.

Observe supervisor safety briefings and provide feedback.

Identify and reduce one safety exposure per month (or quarter); communicate success across the division so others can benefit by learning what you did.

Meet with safety leaders once per month to ensure they are getting active leadership support.

Perform one site audit for a work team outside your department in collaboration with that department's manager to provide a "fresh look" and feedback to peer managers.

"When employees are trying to make life-saving procedures work while also trying to be efficient in their duties, shortcuts may develop that present exposure to serious hazards."
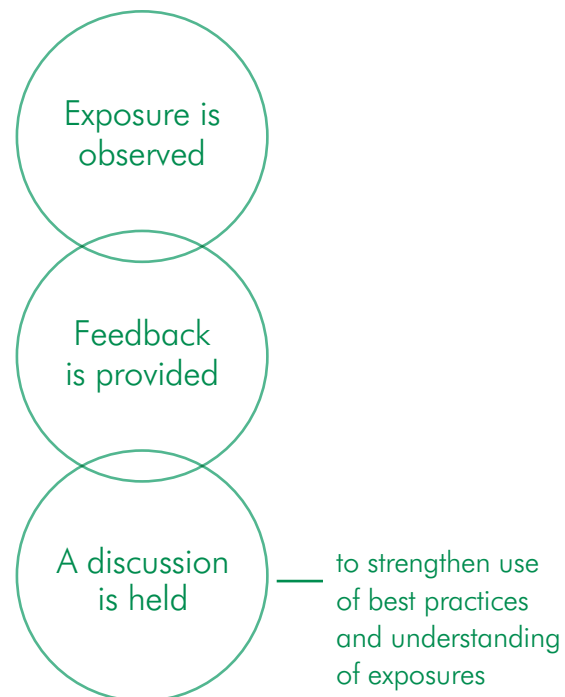
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Strengthen Critical Safety Activities

The reason so many managers struggle to lead safety effectively is because they don't know how to include it within their normal duties. They view safety as a separate task outside their daily activities and simply don't see how they can fit it in. Fortunately, there is a solution that allows managers to **practice critical safety activities** within a relatively small amount of time while simultaneously strengthening key leadership skills that build the culture.

How Managers Lead Safety Activities:

Safety Contacts

are critical safety activities that include **planned or unplanned communication** between a manager and an employee in which:

Exposure is observed

Feedback is provided

A discussion is held —— to strengthen use of best practices and understanding of exposures

Job Safety Briefs

identify ways to mitigate hazards and plan the safest way to approach a task. Managers need to conduct engaging briefings that clearly define what is expected of workers before work begins or is resumed.

Ask open-ended questions.

Use questions that start with "how," "what," and "why."

Actively listen.

Rephrase the employees' comments to ensure you understand their meaning.

Demonstrate that you value employees' feedback.

Receive information positively and avoid becoming defensive.

Use positive, inclusive language.

Say "us" and "we" instead of "you" or "them."

Life-Saving Procedures: Application & Verification.

When employees are trying to make life-saving procedures work while also trying to be efficient in their duties, shortcuts may develop that present exposure to serious hazards. **Managers can work with employees to identify and remove barriers that compromise the effectiveness of life-saving procedures**.

Develop a small set of rules

(No more than eight) that represent high risk in your operations. Ask yourself: Will life-saving rules be enterprise-wide or department specific? Do we need to eliminate variation in existing procedures before we can implement life-saving rules?

Empower people to follow the rule

If there is a rule requiring tie-off for people working at height, make sure there is something to which they can tie-off.

Physical Hazard Identification

is targeted at detecting conditions and equipment that may create exposure to risks—whether immediate or potential. This activity is critical because eliminating exposure is more reliable than depending on employees to consistently perform desired safe behaviors. Conduct "what if" inspections:

Think forward, how will this scene change as time progresses? How will the next injury happen?

What new equipment or people will factor into the exposures?

How will exposure change? How will the potential for injury increase?

Is anything being taken for granted because "we have always done it this way"?

Incident Response and Root Cause Analysis

When an incident occurs, **the manager must respond immediately** to care for injured workers, **secure** any ongoing, imminently dangerous conditions, **and take mitigating steps** to address the exposure long term. In an effective incident response and root cause analysis system:

Employees **believe** management understands and cares about their safety and wellbeing.

Reporting is **unencumbered** by systems or cultural barriers.

Analysis and investigation occur to the level **appropriate** given the incident's potential.

Immediate and root causes are **clearly** defined.

Action items are developed that result in documented, sustained **change**.

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Create a Culture of Commitment

Safety performance is more complex than a binary equation of "human error" vs. "mechanical failure." It is a configuration of risk that extends far beyond the shop floor to include systems and protocols that many consider unrelated to safety. Managers need to **evaluate organizational practices and develop a culture of commitment**—a workplace that encourages safety engagement and creates an environment in which discretionary effort flourishes.

How Managers Create Commitment:

Define What Safety Truly Means

How managers think about safety's role in the organization and define its success shapes the commitment they are asking people to make. Do managers judge safety performance based on the absence of failure? **Or do they use a balanced mix of valid leading and lagging indicators** when assessing safety performance?

Understand the Current State of Culture

Culture is an important element of safety success. Organizations that have strong adaptive cultures (basically, an openness to change) tend to have low-injury rates. Organizations where general functioning is poor, tend to struggle with compliance, and organizational commitment is non-existent. These organizations are also more likely to see compromises and shortcuts in the implementation of safety systems. **Understand where culture is and define a path forward.**

Cultivate Safety Leadership Skills

Managers are ultimately responsible for the culture of the organization. Understand the strengths and gaps in your safety leadership behaviors to reinforce what you're doing well and change what needs to improve. **Leadership can promote a strong, adaptive culture or inadvertently reinforce (or create) poor organizational functioning.**

Earn the Right to Engage the Hourly Workforce

Employees will treat the organization the way the organization treats them. **Managers should develop relationships with employees as real people, not economic units.** They should work on their own credibility, give employees due recognition and feedback, and generally set their shoulder to the wheel alongside co-workers. Together with the front line, managers can develop a workforce committed to eliminating exposures and dedicated to engaging peers in improving safety performance.

Leading Safety Forward

Managers are responsible for assuring employees have what they need to work safely. Fulfilling this responsibility means understanding the principles of good safety management and how managers can execute them. This ebook is an effort to elucidate those principles and encourage organizations to empower mid-level leaders with the knowledge and skills to lead safety into the future. Managers don't need to be safety experts, but they should be able to deploy safety expertise to the best advantage and ensure that the organization's overall management systems contribute to, rather than detract from, world-class safety performance.

If you'd like more information on DEKRA safety leadership development solutions
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