



Gaining Management Support: How to Get Buy-In

The Problem

Have you ever sat through a manager meeting where the Plant Manager beats up on the staff for 30 minutes and tells them they must hit their numbers or quality is unacceptable, there are too many defects and then he looks at you and says, “OK, anything from safety?”. Or you request funding for a ventilation project because employees are complaining about their eyes burning and the response you get from management is, “Does OSHA require this?”.

We’ve all been there... playing salesman for safety, trying to pitch the benefits from a financial standpoint to management personnel who are focused on getting product out the door (or getting the project done quickly, if you are on a construction site) for maximum profitability. It’s not an easy task, as it can be difficult to show ROI (Return on Investment) in terms of cost avoidance. It’s the age-old dilemma of balancing safety against production, and it certainly will continue for the foreseeable future.

So, how do you handle this as a Safety Manager? There are a variety of ways to drive home the importance of safety, if not for the sheer rationale of providing a safe workplace as the “right thing to do”, there are obviously monetary incentives for doing it as well.

The “Wrong” Support

One of the primary reasons management fails to support safety is that we (the safety profession) often ask them to support ineffective, and sometimes counterproductive, practices. Some safety professionals believe, for example, that management must rigidly enforce the safety rules and procedures with punitive methods that kill employee trust and cooperation. Others believe that management should simply finance and pay lip service to their flavor-of-the-month, off-the-shelf quick fixes that never seem to take root. Perhaps worst of all, some safety professionals seem to view management support as firm backing for their attempts to run the entire organizational safety effort with management and the workers as idle bystanders. Support that enables the removal of management from the safety effort is not what you should want.

The “Right” Support

Rather than attempting to manage safety for them, we should want and expect our management to be good managers – of safety! It’s not enough merely writing memos and speeches for managers to deliver. Safety professionals need to help management actively drive the safety effort like other important organizational objectives (e.g., production,



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quality, schedule, costs). Most managers are in their positions because they are successful at getting things done. Safety professionals should encourage managers to use the same skills that got them recognized as effective leaders for the safety effort. Why manage safety differently than other important organizational objectives?

Own Safety

Line management safety ownership cannot be delegated and must be demonstrated. Don't attempt to farm it out to safety specialists, consultants or employee committees. Only your line management can make safety an organizational value and part of the culture. Help them to maximize resources, including your safety staff, the management team and workers, to help succeed and stay actively and visibly involved. Recognize that just as they own production, they should own safety as well. Production, quality, cost and safety, are all interrelated responsibilities. Just telling employees to work safely is not enough. Have them get out of the office and see what workers are doing. Use these work observations to partner with employees to identify ways to work together to help perform work more safely.

Many high safety performance companies believe these on-the-floor, face-to-face employee interactions are the single most important action managers can take to promote safety. Nothing will pay a bigger dividend than for employees to see a visible good example and commitment. It's simply not realistic to expect employees to take safety more seriously than you show them you do.

Manage Safety Like it's a Value

Make sure that safety has been integrated into every aspect of your business from design and procurement to facility shutdowns. If you don't build safety into your business functions, you'll later find safety in competition with them. Like quality, safety is merely part of the work process that is your ultimate responsibility. Don't let it get separated. Ensure that you and your management team meet routinely to hold yourselves accountable and to personally discuss safety issues and progress – like you do for other important business objectives. Ensure timely and appropriate corrective actions are taken – and that they are effective. Your employees expect and deserve prompt attention to their concerns and suggestions for improvement. In short, expect and lead continuous safety improvement.

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Remember the example at the beginning of this article about the Plant Manager harping on production, production, production? If you are sitting in one of these meetings, that is the first of your problems. Safety should be the first item discussed, not the LAST. That is a one-on-one conversation that needs to occur with the Plant Manager. One important principle to drive home to other management personnel, and it's more than simply semantics... "Safety should be a value NOT a priority". Priorities change, a value does not. To learn more about how to elicit management commitment, click [here](#) now.

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New Hydrogen Sulfide Safety Train-the-Trainer Online Course



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Many of you in the oil and gas industry, wastewater treatment and some sectors of general industry have been requesting specific online courses in Hydrogen Sulfide Safety Training. Your requests have not gone unnoticed! Introducing the NASP Hydrogen Sulfide Safety Train-the-Trainer Course. Hydrogen sulfide is an extremely hazardous chemical and leads to a reported nine deaths annually in the US alone (BLS statistics). Learn everything you need to know and use these qualifications to train others in your facilities. Click [here](#) to register for this new, interactive course.

Ergonomic Redesign Reduced Sprain Injuries

Recently, a manufacturer of commercial HVAC accessories was experiencing workers who were suffering from a lot of sprains and strains. Workers would lose concentration and work faster than they had to. They'd also try to lift things by themselves without a buddy and twist instead of moving their feet. The constant sprains and strains were the company's biggest safety challenge. They knew they had to do something to prevent these injuries. So, they called their workers' comp insurance carrier and asked them to do an ergonomic evaluation. The workers comp carrier gave the company plenty of suggestions that worked.

One Year without lost-time injury

The insurer recommended that the plant floor was redesigned according to the 5S standards. The biggest thing that helped was re-organizing ways employees worked and handled equipment. For example, lift tables were installed throughout the plant so employees could work at a more natural height. The whole ergonomic redesign was geared towards getting rid of reasons why workers would twist and become prone to sprains and strains. While it did take some time for workers to get used to the lift tables and other ergonomic equipment, the results were almost immediate. Now, three of this company's plants have gone more than a year without a lost-time injury. Investing in new equipment and 5S standards certainly was worth the time and expense as it has lowered the cost of injuries dramatically. Ergonomic solutions often do not require high priced solutions. Qualify yourself to provide ergonomic assessments and learn training requirements by taking NASP's recently updated [Ergonomic Specialist Course](#).

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Workplace Ergonomics Specialist (WES)

OSHA Fine Slashed, Despite Amputations

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After being fined \$125K following an amputation incident, Alliance Laundry Systems got their penalty slashed by 50% in exchange for making 17 safety enhancements. The fine stems from an incident last July, when a 65-year-old employee lost the tip of his middle finger as he lowered a hydraulic press.

Violation severity downgraded

The previous month, a 26-year-old employee severed his right index finger on a grommet cutting machine, resulting in OSHA violations. Both of these incidents happened less than a year after a 51-year-old employee lost his middle finger when a folding machine crushed his right hand. The firm contested the violations, claiming the incident “is not reflective of that culture of safety we have cultivated” at the century-old commercial laundry manufacturer. At an informal conference, OSHA agreed to downgrade the severity of the violation from willful to repeat and slash the penalties to \$63K. As part of the settlement, Alliance must make enhancements that include:

Hiring more employees to oversee safety; sending workers to training seminars; studying the plant’s injury risks to prevent injuries; and implementing a machine safeguarding mapping program. To find out how to avoid costly citations and implement an effective safety program, attend our upcoming [Certified Safety Manager Course](#) being held May 15-19, 2017 in Wilmington, NC.

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