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Are your Supervisors acting as safety coaches?

It is commonly accepted that Supervisors are critical to delivery of an organisations' safety goals. They hold a position of significant influence over their direct (and indirect) reports, are the visible leader representing the organisation and the person to whom the workforce look to for interpretation of safety culture and priorities.

The safety strategy of an organisation begins at the senior level in an organisation. By the way, quite often it also stops there as well?! Safety leaders should establish the framework for an overarching safety strategy that focusses on high risks and guides activities through safe systems of work and competent people. Supervisors must be given both the competence and confidence to deliver against the standards of the strategy.

When there is a failure to follow the strategy, there should be decisive and timely corrective action. Ideally, failures should be indicated through pro-active monitoring and the adoption of a mindful leadership approach before the failures lead to poor safety performance or even worse, an incident or injury.

What is it that Supervisors can do to achieve more than pure compliance from the people that report to them? To deliver this discretionary effort requires the Supervisor to transform from the traditional 'policing' role to one where they coach for performance.

To be effective coaches, there are four basic questions that need to be answered:

1. What do you want the person to do (be specific)?
2. Is your communication effective (check what message has been received)?
3. What is being done to reinforce desired behaviours (positive reinforcement)?
4. What is being done if people choose to not to adopt the desired behaviours ('Just culture')?

Supervisors coaching for performance in an effective way can improve all areas of a business, not just safety.

Brian Cable is Director at elnet consulting ltd