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SHE & HV advisory services

A lot of organisations that I have worked for, interfaced with and more recently that I have supported through my consultancy often ask me a similar question – 'How can I encourage more reporting of health and safety events or general non-conformance /quality issues'?

As always in life the answer is not straight forward! Let's start with the reasons why reporting of **ALL** events / issues is so critical to the efficiency and effectiveness of an organisation. The advantages of reporting are:

- To understand the effectiveness (or not) of the management system and to identify improvements to 'close the gaps'
- To capture data to allow proactive analysis of trends
- To identify potential improvements
- To learn from the event to prevent repeat issues or more serious consequences in the future
- To continually improve to be a learning organisation

The next question that is usually asked is 'What should I report and what do I call it? Is it a hazard, near miss, non-conformance, etc……….'?

The simple answer to this particular question is to encourage the reporting of everything!

Certainly don't ask people reporting events to get 'hung up' on identifying whether it's a hazard, near miss, incident, RIDDOR……..the importance is in the opportunity to investigate and to learn through the 'event' being reported! Once reported, the categorisation and investigation can all follow at the appropriate time.

If you really want to encourage open and honest reporting you need to keep the process simple, easy to understand and quick to implement. Most importantly, remember to always take the opportunity to praise people for working safely, following procedures and for taking the time to report issues …. but make sure the praise is timely, provided in appropriate circumstances and communicated with sincerity.

Don't over-complicate the reporting form that is provided or the process for reporting via a telephone number. If you utilise a telephone reporting system, remember to brief the people answering calls from employees to ensure the reporting process is a positive experience.

With the practicalities covered, what can be done to provide an environment where people feel comfortable to report everything knowing they will not be 'blamed'. To achieve this the organisation must carry out an investigation that is fair and consistent with the objective to identify management failings and root causes?

It's important to remember the culture within the organisation is chosen by the leaders of the organisation. A 'just culture', where reporting is encouraged and a transparent and consistent investigation process is implemented, needs to:

- Balance human error and accountability
- Acknowledge the differences in the types of error (wilful violation or unintended error)
- Only apportion blame when 'error' is the result of reckless or wilful acts
- Recognise important 'core' organisational behaviours / values
- Recognise that the organisation can put people in a position that allows or encourages 'errors' (eg lack of training, organisational pressure, acceptance of unsafe custom and practice, etc)
- Actively encourage open reporting which is followed up with feedback
- Ask questions before action is taken
- Reckless or wilful acts are dealt with consistently

The benefits of a truly open and honest reporting system are universally recognised. One final point I would emphasise is to remember to focus on the quality of the inputs and not targets such as the number of reports submitted!

The content of this article is intended to provide a general guide to the subject matter. Specialist advice should be sought about your specific circumstances.

Brian Cable is a Director of elnet consulting ltd