

February 2015 – are your supervisors acting as safety leaders?



The role of the supervisor / front line leader (FLL) is a critical role in the organisational structure of every business – and often misunderstood when their role as a safety leader is discussed.

The supervisor / FLL has many responsibilities, including delivering their allocated work to programme, cost and quality. Employers quite justifiably place great importance on technical and managerial skills and the ability to 'get the job done' – sometimes with an over-emphasis on the 'JFDI' approach!

How many employers actively consider health and safety leadership when appointing people to the position of supervisor / FLL? When appointed, how many employers communicate and provide health and safety leadership to the supervisor / FLL to deliver business targets but to do so without harm to the health and safety of employees and anyone else who may be affected?

When health and safety is a core value for your business, the management of health and safety becomes a fundamental part of every decision and an enabler to an efficient and profitable business. Safety leadership is required at all levels within the organisation, including supervisors / FLLs.

The culture of the organisation has a significant part to play in providing a framework where the supervisor / FLL feels empowered and trusted to make the right decisions. To create and engender a culture where safety is a core value, the organisation must have leaders at all levels that:

- have vision and compassion
- are committed to H&S and demonstrate it as a core value
- provide support and empathy
- operate a 'just' culture
- set high standards
- act consistently
- are visible

So what is required of a supervisor / FLL to be a health and safety leader? They must have the competence and confidence to carry out the role and demonstrate the ability to:

- discuss and challenge
- listen
- be enthusiastic
- empathise
- be a role model – remembering everyone will be waiting for that 'chink in the armour' (that moment when you let your standards slip or do not 'walk the talk')
- be consistent
- manage change
- lead by example
- encourage reporting of events / incidents

- investigate incidents to learn lessons
- use discipline when appropriate
- build relationships to engender trust and build rapport
- understand their own strengths / weaknesses / preferences – and those of the people that work with them

The supervisor / FLL role is absolutely critical to the success of your business – what are you doing to recruit, support and develop them to lead your business forward?

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.

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