

August 2015 – improving health and safety performance?



In a recent article for SHP¹, Dr Dominic Cooper challenged stakeholders in health and safety to remove their 'rose-tinted glasses' regarding the number of deaths and serious injuries still occurring in the UK. In summary, he stated there was a level of complacency with respect to the industry view of improvement in health and safety performance. He quite rightly states that to make improvement we must first recognise there is a problem!

Read the full article here:

<http://www.shponline.co.uk/wake-up-britain-we-are-being-too-complacent-about-our-safety-performance/>

If health and safety stakeholders are able to recognise and acknowledge there is an issue, what needs to change to enable them to rise to the challenge? Firstly, the organisation must be assured that some basic building blocks are present so that the foundations of a good safety management system are solid and enduring. These should include:

- Great communication (two-way)
- Easy to understand procedures
- The environment to implement the procedures and to challenge if they can't be followed
- Competent people
- Leaders who are passionate about health and safety
- A few critical safety rules / values
- Trust

The foundations for the management and implementation of health and safety must be constantly maintained and refreshed because if they are eroded (eg procedures routinely not followed) or undermined (eg poor management health and safety culture) everything built upon them will ultimately fail because of the underlying weaknesses.

Once the organisation has developed a level of health and safety maturity, the next step is to focus on changing the culture to persuade people to do the right thing, even when no-one is watching. The culture of every organisation is different, therefore the attitude of the organisation towards health and safety and the maturity of its approach will need to be assessed through surveys and discussions.

This is where some (too many?) traditional stakeholders in health and safety have struggled to move from a bureaucratic (tick-box) approach to health and safety to an approach where employees are truly engaged with management, safety is a core value in every decision made within the business and ultimately the safety culture within the business drives efficiency, value for all stakeholders and ultimately profit.

How can key stakeholders be persuaded to recognise the need for a different approach to health and safety and implement the change in culture necessary to deliver the desired improvements?²

- Know your audience – recognise who the conversation is with and adapt the language to get your point of view across
- Connect – a simple introduction at the beginning of the conversation, to acknowledge it is between two people, goes a long way to a successful outcome
- Don't be pushy – be assertive and confident without being aggressive or pushy. Be clear on the outcomes but be patient and play the 'long game'.
- Don't seek approval – present ideas as statements and interesting facts without using qualifying statements
- Use positive body language – how you say something can be more important than what you are saying. Positive body language will help you engage with your audience and convince them that what you're saying is valid
- Be clear and concise – know your subject so that you keep communication short and you are clear.
- Acknowledge others point of view – admit that your argument is not perfect to demonstrate that you are open-minded and willing to adjust. Adopt active listening - ask good questions for clarification and to demonstrate you understand the meaning of the words being spoken
- Paint a picture – use visual images or tell vivid stories to embed the words into the mind of others
- Leave a strong first impression and be confident in yourself – people make quick decisions about others based upon body language. Be aware of strong posture, firm handshake, a smile, etc to ensure your first impression is a good one and you are genuine and honest
- Use the name of people – people feel good when you use their name, not only when you first meet them but within a conversation.
- Smile – people that smile have a genuine enthusiasm for their ideas. People naturally (and unconsciously) mirror the body language of the person they are talking to.

Health and safety professionals who adopt the above approach will become adept at reading and responding to other people and be better at persuading people to recognise the need for change (ie to take responsibility for health and safety, to look out for themselves and their colleagues and to challenge themselves and others if they are not sure about something).

¹ *Wake up Britain: We are being too complacent about our safety performance Dr Dominic Cooper article published in SHP 20th July 2015*

² *Secrets of really persuasive people Dr Travis Bradberry article published on LinkedIn 16th July 2015*

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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