

September 2016 – the importance of employee engagement



A key fundamental to a positive safety culture is employee engagement. Engaged employees understand the values of the business and consistently deliver the outputs of the business in compliance with the desired safety culture.

Involvement + ownership = employee engagement

Before thinking about employee engagement, it is important to understand the foundations that must be present to deliver the real value from engaged employees. These are:

- Trust built upon a strong relationship between leaders and employees where leaders talk with and listen to employees to understand them as individuals and the challenges they face at work
- Open communication lines between employees, their peers and leaders so that people are both competent and confident to discuss their work and to raise any concerns to ensure issues are dealt with quickly and professionally. This enables great teams to work efficiently
- Consistent approach up and down the organisation. Disengaged or poorly performing managers or supervisors will quickly impact on the safety culture. Senior leaders must deliver their roles and responsibilities consistently

How do we engage employees?

1. Allow them to input into decision-making
Ask employees for ideas to improve their contribution rather than impose practices on them. People are more likely to accept change if they feel involved and they have suggested at least some of the changes.
Participation in safety meetings and input into toolbox talks and risk assessments will strengthen safety culture.
2. Immediate recognition for 'doing the right thing' or delivering a positive contribution
Don't wait to provide reinforcement and encouragement when an employee does something to contribute to a positive safety culture. Any delay will lose the impact and the employee will be less likely to repeat the desired behaviour.
3. Clear roles and responsibilities
Ensure every employee understands how they contribute to the overall objectives of the organisation and the value they deliver
4. Provide the right environment and tools to do the job well
Explain the expectations the organisation has of employees and provide them with the right tools to do their job well (listen to them and ask for input into the processes and procedures)
5. Provide opportunities for growth and development
Take the time to understand each employee and their motivation whilst at work so that a personal development plan is exactly that, not just a piece of paper!
6. Regular, high quality discussions with their supervisor
Regular, honest feedback from a supervisor on performance is vital to engaging employees. Feedback needs to be timely, honest and based upon fact but also provide an opportunity to listen. In addition, regular meetings should be planned between supervisor and employee to provide more structure to the conversation on a routine basis.

All of the above are inter-related and any one initiative will not build successful employee engagement. The leader must initiate the engagement and demonstrate perseverance and patience to deliver the real benefits employee engagement can bring to strengthening the safety culture in an organisation.

Read more of my blogs [here](#).

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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