

Getting ready for your kick-off meeting

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Reviewing behind-the-scenes preparation

Louie and his friend Bill are sitting outside their company's conference room, waiting for the kick-off session that will commence a behavioral safety initiative. They're wondering about the inventory of important work-related behaviors that they helped to develop in a number of small group meetings. They're also looking for assurance that this behavior-based approach won't be used to place blame on workers.

Kick-off meetings are important to help to close the loop in a behavior-based approach, and also to spread and embed the practice. That loop includes establishing foundation principles, practicing various activities, and providing tools. Training and basic awareness is expanded. Finally, those principles and actions are embedded in the organization in ways that encourage participation, allowing for greater depth and breadth of the process to be embraced throughout the culture.

Laying the groundwork

What was going on behind the scenes prior to Louie and Bill attending their kick-off meeting?

Leaders, stakeholders, and a design team were taught basic concepts, principles, and briefed.

The general workforce worked through a number of short meetings and gained a reasonably good understanding of the process; inventories were developed within small groups (with the whole workforce contributing) and further refined for initial use; and observers were trained.

An agenda was prepared for a series of kick-off meetings, leaders were contacted to speak at the meetings, and a schedule was drawn up.

Building support

An important part of this process called for leaders within the organization to show support. This means that everyone — directors of human resources and operations, safety professionals, supervisors, team-leaders, and at least some design team members — be made available. Individuals from other operating units or groups that experienced success with behavioral processes were included on the agenda to provide their “personal testimony” about what they’ve come to learn. A briefing was also conducted in order to assure that everyone was on the “same page.”

Setting the tone

The content of kick-off meetings should help set the tone for a promising “future-state.” It’s also important to define the roles and responsibilities of a broad range of individuals and groups. Content covers: an outline and objectives; basic concepts and principles that have been taught; a review of the behavioral inventory, including how employees provided input; goals; frequency of observation and group feedback sessions; and finally, a general discussion of concerns and fears.

Executives speaking at these meetings must understand the basics of the process. They need to have had some form of related leadership training. Still, they may need a facilitator, consultant or design team member to provide an outline of talking points.

These points should include a brief history of safety and how the behavioral approach was chosen. Executives should also discuss the company’s vision for safety, communicating that a behavior-based approach is something that will help to move them closer to that vision and better express the company’s values.

Every worker must be assured that this is a positive process, not a blame-the-worker approach; a process that will help them align their personal values with their own actions.

Kick-off meetings must also stress to workers that supportive safety work, as well as investigations, regulatory controls, review and reinforcement of procedures and practices, and ongoing training, will all continue. Hazard abatement, engineering reviews, and ergonomic efforts will also proceed, each working hand-in-hand with this new process. Every individual needs to know that he or she is

a valuable contributor and that behavior-based safety can only thrive in a culture where everyone participates.

At Louie and Bill's meeting, large wall charts were used to show what's occurred over the last five years — a kind of a historical presentation of safety. The current theme for the session was proclaimed in banner: "Working Safely: A Way of Life." Baseline behavioral performance was posted using large graphical displays. The charts were very colorful and vivid so that performance scores could be discussed in simple, relevant terms that everyone understood.

When the meeting was finished, Louie was smiling at Bill. "I think we should give this our best shot. It could work out real well for us," he said.