



5 CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF SAFETY LEADERSHIP

By Paul J. Colangelo- National Director of Compliance Programs and Steve Bowers, C.S.P. – Content Team at ClickSafety.com

Successful companies strive to utilize every tool possible to ensure their projects are safe, on schedule and within budget. New methods are developed and “piloted” each year in an effort to constantly improve project execution and satisfy customer expectations. However, all too often the safety program is one that has not been updated for years and their safety performance is often more the result of luck than reproducible results. Many companies understand the need for OSHA compliance and work to enforce regulatory requirements as their safety program. Industry leading companies don’t accept compliance to government regulations as their success criteria and continuously seek out new and proven safety management methodologies. One of the proven tools for preventing injuries and incidents, and one that is often overlooked and underutilized is effective safety leadership by both project executives and their management team. Effective safety leadership is a safety management tool that can be the major differentiator between average and industry leading safety performance.

The 5 critical components of effective safety leadership are:

- 1. Field Presence** – From the CEO down to the newest project engineer, there is no better way to measure your safety culture and its effectiveness than shaking the hands of the workforce and asking them for feedback. By committing a minimum of 1 hour each week out of your hectic schedule to walk the field, you are not only showing your project team and workforce that you care, but you are setting the standard for the entire project team, and establishing the importance of demonstrating safety leadership. Far too many project leaders stay holed up in the site trailer or office attending endless hours of meetings, failing to realize the importance of personal presence and interaction with the workforce. Focus should be on role modeling safety expectations and sharing your vision on providing and maintaining an injury and incident free jobsite. Take every opportunity to share your vision with the trade professionals and how important their safety is to you!
- 2. Effective Communication** – Far too many projects unknowingly support an underground rumor mill of false and misleading information, often to the detriment of the safety culture. Typically caused by the failure of management to effectively communicate after an injury, incident or unexplainable event occurs; this lack of accurate information allows the rumor mill to become the accepted source of information. Effective Safety Leadership requires excellent communication skills, implementing proven safety processes and aligning all personnel with your vision of what success looks like. The ability to effectively communicate to the project team, your subs and the workforce is paramount to achieving safety excellence. The most opportune time to effectively communicate safety expectations and gain the trust and respect of the workforce is in the project safety orientation. Excellent safety leadership has been demonstrated in the past by project executives teaching orientation or just dropping in to introduce themselves and share their personal commitment to safety. In addition, utilize newsletters, all hands and tool box meetings to get the word out on progress, injuries, incidents and the public recognition of safety role models on the project.
- 3. Feedback Mechanism** - Understanding the true safety culture on your projects is accomplished by developing a direct avenue of communication between the workforce and management. This can be accomplished by establishing an effective safety committee that is attended by workforce representatives, a “Lunch with the Boss” forum that is scheduled routinely with a cross representation of workers attending a small, private lunch with the project manager, and weekly field walks that are designed solely to solicit direct feedback on conditions, perceptions and issues.
- 4. Accountability** - If there is one common theme that is present on most failed safety cultures it is the “do as I say and not as I do” phenomenon. Watching executives or project leadership walk projects in street shoes, sans safety glasses, vests, hardhats etc., is the most prominent culture killer there is. The workforce will recognize the lack of role modeling and accountability for the safety program and they will outwardly and silently rebel against the double standards. Take the time to ensure all project personnel, regardless of title, follow all safety rules... at all times... also, it is paramount that all discipline is fair, just and consistent across all job classifications. Everyone must be held accountable for their actions... starting with Management.



5. **Benchmarking** – Great leaders understand that in order to be the best, they must routinely seek out new processes and try new ideas, in their quest to eliminate injuries and incidents. Benchmarking with your competitors or joining industry groups that openly share best known methods is the best way to assess the contents of your safety program and overall performance. Establishing a continuous improvement roadmap will help ensure your safety programs and systems are keeping pace with your project management systems.

Summary – We have touched on 5 critical components of successful safety leadership. While there are many key attributes that differentiate between a good and great leader, the main difference is most often the level of personal commitment a leader exhibits to those that look up to them for guidance and direction. Successful safety leadership is never measured by the effort put forward, but by the results gained and the lives affected, often permanently.

About the Authors:

Paul Colangelo and Steve Bowers, C.S.P. are part of ClickSafety's content team and are actively involved in building online safety courses. For more information, email sbowers@ClickSafety.com or paul.colangelo@ClickSafety.com or go online to www.ClickSafety.com.