

Walk the Talk: Safety Feedback that Motivates

Focus on visible behaviors, not just the absence of injuries

When we define safety in terms of behaviors that make injuries less likely (like using appropriate Personal Protection Equipment, the right tools, and following procedures, etc.), we can identify the potential for an injury before it happens. When feedback without criticism can correct a behavior that puts an employee at risk, we are practicing prevention.

To avoid the blame game, put the situation in a larger perspective and avoid labels to describe behavior. Finally, realize that sometimes simply correcting without criticism is not enough.

Highlight good safety performances

As important as corrective feedback is, it's even more important to praise safe behaviors that you see. When done properly, this type of "social reinforcement" will increase the value of safe behavior when compared to the more at-risk ways of doing the same job. Praise should be genuine and specific.

Provide feedback quickly

To prevent injuries caused by at-risk behavior, the corrective feedback must happen immediately to reduce your risk exposure. Likewise, giving positive feedback should happen right away to help prevent employees from performing at-risk behavior because it provides immediate comfort, convenience, or may save time.

If this is not practical, then add more detail when providing the feedback. It will help the employee re-live the event, increasing the likelihood that he or she will perform the same safe behavior again in similar circumstances. Being specific also shows that you took the time to notice and that you care about safety.

Be more positive than negative

In a reasonably well-functioning workplace, there should be a lot of safe behaviors being observed. Each one is an opportunity to increase the value of safety. While it's not necessary to praise every example of safe behavior, we should be able to find more things to praise than to correct. A good ratio would be four praises for every one correction.

Provide feedback privately

The old idea to "praise publicly" and "reprimand privately" is NOT good advice. Both should be done one-on-one and in private. This helps to avoid embarrassing the recipient in front of their peers. This can negate any positive feedback. It also helps to avoid other employees from getting upset if they thought they were equally deserving of praise.

Avoid the feedback sandwich

Many managers feel that when providing feedback, they should start with a positive and end with a positive, putting the negative part in the middle. This should NEVER be done. It only confuses workers and makes the feedback less effective.

Use 'and' instead of 'but' or 'however'

By using those words instead of "and", we negate whatever the other person has said. Using "and" shows that you respect their opinions by considering there may be more than one right way. It may feel awkward to start your point of view with "and", but it will do wonders to de-escalate conflict.

There are many other good communication practices, but the above list is a good routine to get have in order to help communicate safe behaviors.

For more information and additional risk management and prevention tools, visit: fwcruminsurance.com