

Difficulties in speaking up.

Most people, most of the time are acting safely – whether doing a specific task or whilst going about their daily lives. This means that we have lots of opportunities to *catch them at it* and deal with them accordingly - give some praise, thanks and recognition where appropriate.

All of us from time to time allow ourselves to be distracted, become complacent or slip into bad habits and take a short-cut or choose an unsafe behaviour. It is at this time that we have to rely on our observant friends, colleagues, work mates or passers-by to bring this to our attention.

Far too often that *friend* doesn't say anything to keep us out of danger. Why not? Often we find it difficult to speak up when we see someone acting unsafely. People come up with a number of reasons for this, including the following:

"I don't know what reaction I might get – they might react badly"

"I don't really understand the job they are doing – I might look foolish"

"I just haven't got time to stop"

"I don't really know what to say".

Let's try and deal with some of these concerns.

The reaction you get will almost certainly depend on the approach that you take. The aggressive response is just a defence mechanism to overcome the embarrassment or perceived threat. Ensure you are not creating this feeling in the person you are approaching. Show a degree of humility as well as a sincere concern for their well-being. If someone sees that you genuinely care they are unlikely to *have a go* at you.

Not really understanding the task being done presents a fantastic opportunity to show that humility. You have the chance to ask the really obvious questions – handing control over to the person to whom you have approached.

Let's just translate the phrase "I haven't got time". We have got time – time is a given, a constant; how we choose to use it is what changes. We allocate time to what we value, what is important to us. So putting the phrase into the translator we get back *"It isn't important to me, I have got something more important to do."* Have you ever noticed how often people complain that they don't have the occasional 5 minutes to carry out a safety conversation, but as soon as an accident occurs we always find the hours or days required to conduct the follow-up investigation. Amazing!

Not knowing how to approach someone is a genuine concern, which is why it is important that people do have some basic skills and get the chance to practice. What is needed is a simple, flexible, structure to follow. *Simple* because we don't need anything complicated; *Flexible* because every person and every situation is different; yet, *Structured* to make it easy to ensure we cover off the important elements.

When faced with a situation that requires you to approach someone doing something unsafe consider the following points:

- Think about your approach and how you come across;
- Consider how you would want to be approached;
- Demonstrate that you care;
- Be realistic and sensible;
- Show empathy and understanding;
- Be positive, don't apologize: *"really sorry, but can I just have a word?"* sets the wrong tone, suggesting that you would rather not be having the conversation.

And if someone does snap back at you? Well big deal, at least you have tried and the snappy individual will probably still think about what you have said anyway.

I have heard some great examples recently of experiences and how they were handled. It would be great to hear about any situations you have found yourself in. Please share them with the rest of us.