

Safety Engagement – Getting it Right

I strongly believe that effective safety engagement is central to achieving an improved safety culture. Furthermore, safety culture and safety leadership are inseparable; leaders drive the culture and have the greatest influence on the nature of that culture. At the heart of leaderships is communication. A good leader, at any level, communicates well with his or her team, getting buy-in for the common goal; clearly explain the chosen path; and, listening to the hopes and concerns of the individuals within the team. These are skills that can be learnt and improved upon. When it comes to safety in particular, communication is not always what it should be.

Through your choice of safety engagement tools, you can provide a simple, flexible structure that helps to make the safety engagement easier and more effective. How these tools are put into practice will determine how much benefit you can gain from them. We have to make sure that we *Get it Right*.

By *Getting it Right* I mean that the engagement must be:

- At the ***Right Time***;
- In the ***Right Place***;
- On the ***Right Topic***; and,
- In the ***Right Way***.

The ***Right Time*** means when it is convenient - not just for you to ensure that you are giving it your full attention, but also for the person with whom you want to engage. If they are in the middle of a complex task it probably isn't the *Right Time*. You want to choose a time when the subject will be receptive – right at the end of their shift may not be ideal. The *Right Time* will often be *Right Now* – but it might not be – use your judgement. Of course, if someone is behaving unsafely and putting themselves or others at risk it is always ***the Right Time***.

The ***Right Place*** will be somewhere that is appropriate for a meaningful conversation. The *Right Place* will ideally be at the place where the task is being undertaken but consider noise, heat and other environmental factors. Ensure it is safe and comfortable enough to be having an engagement in that location. For some activities it is not appropriate to be engaging with someone at the time and place of the task - when talking with a driver, for example. Usually, the most comfortable place for an employee will be in their space, on their *territory*, where they are likely to be more relaxed and therefore more forthcoming with information.

The ***Right Topic***. We shouldn't approach a safety engagement with too rigid an agenda. Of course we can have topics that we want to include but we mustn't let these get in the way of a good discussion by avoiding the subjects that an employee raises. The *Right Topics* will be relevant, current and searching – not just the easy, obvious topics – not just PPE! By a simple shift of emphasis we can easily convert our safety engagements into quality engagements, environmental engagements or any other aspect of work. The principles are the same whatever the topic.

The ***Right Way*** is, of course the main element to our engagement. How we approach and engage with someone will determine the response that we get and what we achieve from the opportunity. Whilst the traditional approach to talking about safety often seems to be negative and miserable,

let's break with tradition and try to portray a more positive, friendly, relaxed manner. Your role in this engagement is to ask worthwhile questions then listen to what people have to say in response. Try to give a bit of respect for their knowledge and understanding and show some empathy for their point of view. Use language that they will understand and, if you know them, take the approach that you know is most suited to them.

If we can achieve each of these elements then we will get the most out of the time that we invest in our safety engagements.

