

Getting the most out of your Engagement

Central to most peoples' idea of improving culture in a workplace is enhancing communication across the various boundaries that often exist: departments, functions and grades. This is really about the sharing of learning experiences in order to gain the best advantage from any situation. This might include reporting a near miss/close call, sharing the findings of an accident investigation, passing on someone's brilliant idea for an improvement or just having a great one-to-one conversation with someone about the job they are doing.

All of you reading this will have a pretty good idea in your mind about what good looks like in relation to all the above:

- A good near miss report would have all the relevant facts; what the consequences could have been; how and why the situation arose; and, what could be done to prevent it in future.
- Similarly all relevant details resulting from an accident report will be shared widely along with the root causes so that parallels can be drawn across all other parts of the workplace, even when at first glance they are quite different.
- You will recognise good one-to-one engagement. You know about being positive, reinforcing safe behaviour, questioning the unsafe and prompting thoughts about the consequences.

You understand all that. But does everyone in your business? When you get a frustratingly limited near miss report is it because the person reporting it didn't want to give more detail or is it because you haven't made it clear to them what you would like and why?

Poor one-to-one engagement on the other hand is not just about the grumpy supervisor or stressed manager shouting at someone to fasten their seatbelt or wear their PPE. This would obviously constitute poor, ineffective engagement but you have all got beyond that; you have given your safety leaders training and coaching on how to engage effectively. There are other ways of getting this wrong, maybe not so obvious.

Top of my list would be 'the missed opportunity' as it just seems such a waste. This might be the Team Leader that goes to visit a couple of guys on a job in order to check on progress and leaves it at that. All the time and effort has already been spent on going to see the team and it only takes a few moments extra to ask about the safety of the job, any problems, any suggestions or comment on the behaviours observed.

Then we have the lack of genuine interest or 'dismissive'. This may be the manager who goes to check up on the safety of a job (safety must be important then!) but fails to engage with the person whilst there. This can come across as a box-ticking exercise or a checking-up-on-you policing approach: "Just making sure you have got the machine locked-off". Not very personable, a bit patronising and another missed opportunity.

We might have someone who has a fantastic engagement, draws out all sorts of lessons that are of immediate benefit to themselves and to the person they have spoken to – but then what? If they don't have, or make the best use of, a system for sharing that learning how will anyone else also benefit?

Take a look around, are your leaders making the most of every chance to communicate and engage effectively with your teams. If not you are missing an opportunity.