

ADOPT A CULTURE OF SAFETY

6 STEPS TO CREATE
A SAFE, PRODUCTIVE
WORKPLACE



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> What do workplace culture and workplace safety have to do with each other? A lot. If we think of workplace culture as a way of describing how things are done, then safety must play a critical role in the kind of culture that exists.

Creating and maintaining a culture of workplace safety goes beyond OSHA standards, personal protective equipment (PPE), training videos, safety captains and incident reports. And, exceptionally safe, productive workplaces don't happen by accident (or as the result of one). Instead, they are woven into the fabric of a company as a fundamental part of the operation and are a critical component of its long-term success.

The most effective workplace cultures aren't the error-free ones. They are the ones who are relentless in their effort to learn and improve from mistakes as they happen — and, most importantly, they work to prevent them from happening in the first place.

Although it can be challenging to think of changing mindsets, behaviors, habits and attitudes, creating a safe, positive workplace environment can do more than just help keep employees safe — it can help keep them more engaged, more productive and more invested in the success of the company. When workers see that the company has taken a genuine interest in their well-being, they feel valued which in most instances leads to better on-the-job performance.

Here are six steps you can take to adopt a safety-focused culture, one that will help create — and maintain — safer, more productive workplaces.





> STEP 1: ADAPT YOUR EH&S PROGRAM TO MEET SAFETY EXPECTATIONS

The first step to any successful plan is knowing where things stand. A careful assessment of your organization can start with asking questions about systems and processes already in place, along with building an understanding of what safety metrics are currently in use.

For example, if incident rates are the only measurement of safety, then the only actions being measured are those that happen after an accident has already occurred. A more powerful metric measures preemptive activities —the steps taken to help ensure an incident doesn't happen in the first place. Then, when a safety-related measurement shows signs of a problem, action can be taken before an incident occurs and productivity is affected.

Because safety expectations can change quickly — EH&S programs and policies must adapt just as fast. By regularly revisiting your company policies, you can help keep your employees safe and empower your team to respond efficiently and quickly.

1. Establish company-wide communication and emergency response plans.

Building and maintaining a culture of safety should include regular reassessment and updates to communication and emergency response plans. From ensuring contact information is up to date to conducting risk assessments, taking action to review these types of elements now can help you mitigate risk as well as make more informed decisions when an emergency or unexpected challenge arises.

2. Identify a cross-functional team to tap into in case of an emergency.

EH&S efforts cannot work in a silo. It's critical to build a broader team that taps expertise and insights from all relevant departments, such as human resources, IT, operations and executive leadership. Aligning a team before a crisis happens can help fill gaps in response plans, and, just as importantly, it can help build stakeholder buy-in for safety processes, policies and plans.

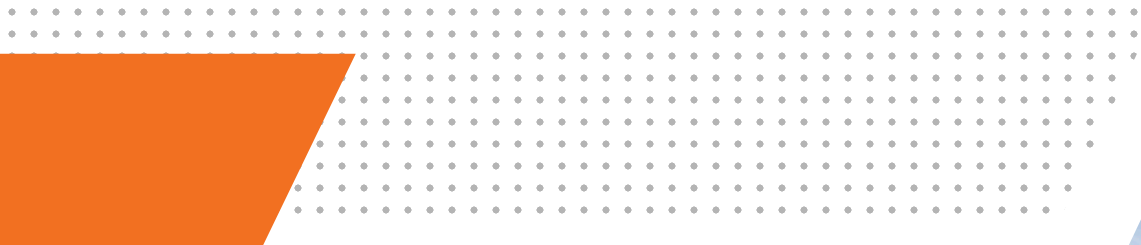
3. Redefine safety metrics and incorporate them into regular reporting.

Take a hard look at your health and safety program and ask yourself, "Are there new metrics that should be captured?" It's a good idea to evaluate this at least yearly to ensure your program meets new regulations and stays on the leading edge of safety trends. Additionally, safety metrics may not be reported on as frequently as production numbers. Show the team that safety is a priority by talking about it every day.

4. Update training protocols and requirements.

In crises, recommendations and guidelines may seem to shift almost daily. Revisit training to ensure protocols and requirements meet current needs and can adapt to the future. Having open-ended conversations with frontline team members can provide valuable insight into needed updates. For example, you might ask "Describe the last time you had to adapt your process." Use the feedback to guide your training updates.





> STEP 2: IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES FOR TRAINING

Employees need to know more than simply how to use the tools of the trade. They need to know what actions and activities might lead to unsafe practices.

Once understood, a trained employee is more likely to embrace workplace safety because they are more able to identify breaches in protocol by themselves — and the effects that these actions can have upon their safety or those of their coworkers.

Proper training also helps ensure employees understand how safety protocols help the bottom line (both for the company and themselves).

Although there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach that guarantees successful learning and retention, there are strategies you can use to help trainees understand and apply the concepts you teach.

Whether you're teaching workers how to operate equipment safely or covering general workplace safety information, it's important to provide accurate, clear training that engages your audience. Most learners appreciate variety. By having them participate in several different ways throughout the training, you're reinforcing principles and encouraging an "aha" moment.

Now that we understand the different ways people may participate in safety training, let's talk about how to promote better learning and retention during training sessions. Try some—or all—of these strategies when it's time to provide your staff with a refresher on workplace safety.

1. Include Activity-Based Learning

Activity-based learning engages trainees in an experience. It prompts them to actively participate in the learning process rather than passively consume information. OSHA notes that, ideally, activity-based learning should fill at least two-thirds of your training time.

2. Set Clear Objectives

Many learners appreciate having a road map that tells them what they'll be learning when they'll be learning it and why it's important. That doesn't mean you have to go into detail about what will be covered. It can be as simple as providing a short agenda for the session.



3. Offer Hands-On Training

Hands-on training is required in some situations, but even if it isn't, it can be a great way to promote better retention. This is similar to activity-based learning, but while activity-based learning may be concept-driven, hands-on training focuses on the practical application of those concepts.

4. Stick to Relevant Material

No one wants to attend a training session that's a waste of their time. Keep your information succinct and relevant. The more you can help trainees understand the "why" behind safety concepts, the more likely they are to buy in and champion safety in the workplace.

5. Encourage Collaboration

Unless you're training all-new employees, chances are there will be some knowledgeable workers in your class. Make sure you treat them with respect and ask them to share their perspectives and experiences. Real-world stories and feedback from veteran employees can help the rest of the class learn.





> **STEP 3: COORDINATE SUCCESSFUL SHIFT-TO-SHIFT HANDOFFS**

Standards exist for a reason, and everyone must understand safety is no more or less of a concern for anyone in the company than anyone else.

Every employee — from frontline workers to upper management — should feel a sense of both expectation and empowerment: An expectation that everyone will adhere to established safety guidelines and empowerment to act when violations are witnessed. All employees must feel comfortable discussing potential problems and have adequate systems and policies in place to do so.

Successful shift-to-shift handoffs are one of the most essential tools companies can use to make sure that teams and leadership are communicating effectively about issues and opportunities.

Before the Handoff

Depending on your environment, shift handoffs may be complex or can be kept very simple. A hospital, for example, will have a much more complicated shift handoff than a retail store. However, no matter what your organization does or makes, the most important first step is to create a shift handoff procedure.

A shift handoff procedure performs two functions:

- 1)** It defines each step of the handoff process and sets expectations for each person's role in that process.
- 2)** It also identifies how these handoffs take place. Will it be a written report that's passed from one supervisor to another? A short meeting around the whiteboard? Or maybe you have an internal system where employees can capture notes about a shift to easily pass information throughout your organization. The method you choose will depend on your organization's safety, data and document retention requirements.



Once you've created a shift handoff procedure, make sure that all employees who will be involved in the handoff are trained on the procedure and are aware of expectations. By training employees and laying the foundation for productive handoffs, you can help improve communication and performance down the line.

During the Handoff

The relief supervisor needs to arrive early. This allows him or her to have conversations with key team members on the current shift before they've clocked out and are on their way home. It also relieves the pressure of getting everything organized while other employees are standing around, ready to start their shifts.

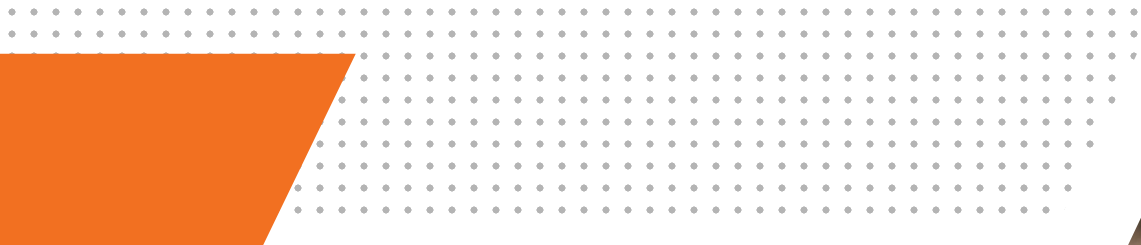
During the handoff, both supervisors should complete the shift handoff procedure, as well as a walk-through. The walk-through allows them to observe the environment and communicate schedule changes, equipment or maintenance issues, call-offs and any other problems that arose on the previous shift. By discussing these items now, the relief supervisor can hopefully experience fewer unforeseen issues on the upcoming shift.

After the Handoff

Once the handoff is complete and the relief supervisor takes over, they're responsible for following up on any items noted during the shift handoff procedure. This includes briefing the incoming shift about any ongoing issues or relevant schedule changes.

And of course, toward the end of their shift, the outgoing supervisor should again prepare to complete the shift handoff procedure before leaving for the day.





> STEP 4: PLAN FOR AN EMERGENCIES

By their very definition, emergencies occur without warning, meaning people who are affected by them don't have time to think or to gather basic supplies before they react.

Both man-made hazards, like chemical spills or electrical fires, and natural disasters, like earthquakes and tornadoes, are considered workplace emergencies. Although no one can ever be 100% prepared for an emergency, you can cut down on confusion and minimize danger by putting a solid plan in place long before an emergency happens.

Creating an Emergency Action Plan (EAP)

The best way to be prepared in an emergency is to create an emergency action plan, a document that helps guide employees on the best course of action in the event of a workplace emergency. A successful emergency action plan is supplemented with robust training programs, employee drills and clear communication about expectations and responsibilities during an incident.

Evacuation Procedures

When putting together an emergency action plan, it's important to determine the safest, most efficient way to evacuate an area if it becomes necessary.

Disorganized evacuations may lead to injuries, confusion and property damage, so it's important to think through many different scenarios. An evacuation from a high rise would be different than an evacuation from an outdoor job site. Likewise, an earthquake evacuation would be different than an evacuation from an active shooter situation.

To determine the best evacuation procedures for your workplace, ask:

- What situations would make evacuating my workplace necessary?
- What is the correct chain of command, including who is authorized to call for an evacuation?
- What are the most efficient evacuation routes and exits from each part of the building?
- Are there any specific people who need to remain in the building to shut down critical systems after most people have been evacuated?
- How will workers be accounted for after an evacuation?



Shelter-in-Place Procedures

Sometimes, evacuation isn't the safest course of action. For example, an approaching tornado may require your employees to take shelter in an interior room of the building, or a chemical spill near your building may make it safer to remain inside until the hazard is cleaned up. This process of taking refuge in an interior room with few windows is considered sheltering in place.

If you determine that sheltering in place is your best course of action, you should:

- Close your workplace and alert employees, clients and visitors to remain inside the building
- Lock exterior doors, close windows and shut down HVAC systems
- Identify and stockpile essential disaster supplies, like bottled water and first-aid kits
- Select an interior room with no windows, preferably with a hardwired telephone available
- Listen to the radio, watch TV or access the internet to monitor the situation, so you know when it's safe to leave





> STEP 5: UTILIZE SIGNAGE TO KEEP EVERYONE INFORMED

Every employee is a potential investment in the success or failure of a company's safety initiatives. The core of this engagement is communication.

Most importantly, it's critical to lead by example. Nothing communicates more clearly than seeing how leadership buys into its mandates — if they don't see you doing it, there's little reason for them to behave any differently.

At the same time, regular communication can help increase acceptance and ensure employees feel they are both part of the change process and being kept in the loop. Monthly or even weekly discussions may be necessary to help keep teams engaged and ensure goals are being met.

There are many ways to communicate safety policies and goals to your team, from toolbox talks to in-depth safety training. But one way to ensure teams across your organization receive a consistent, daily reminder is to create informative safety signage.

Communicating clear safety messages not only helps to prevent workplace injuries but can also lead to increased productivity, profitability and employee engagement. When you post signs where a safety incident is most likely to occur — such as near equipment, in stairwells and by entryways to PPE-required areas — you reach employees at the exact moment when they can make a positive safety decision. This helps keep safety top of mind, no matter the task.

There are four basic principles you can apply to create engaging, successful safety signage:

1. Keep Text Simple

Remember that safety signage is meant to remind people, not to train them.

So, think about the safety training your employees receive and boil it down to the most important messages. Keep them clear and concise, and try using numbers, symbols and icons to shorten the text. This allows people to read and digest signs quickly as they're working. If you have longer, more detailed information to share, save it for your safety huddle. Or, try adding a URL or QR code to your safety signage so people know where to go for more information.

2. Include Images & Illustrations

Studies have shown that people remember images far better than they remember text.

Consider what images might help illustrate the point of your safety sign. In some cases, there's already a recognizable image to accompany the message, like the icon on a wet floor sign. But if you're selecting your own imagery, make sure you choose visuals that are the right blend of attention-grabbing, high-quality and clear.



The last thing you want to do is pair a safety message with an unrelated image that confuses your employees rather than helping them stay safe.

3. Apply Recognizable Colors

When choosing colors for your safety signage, it's a good idea to start with OSHA's and ANSI's recommended safety colors.

Many of these colors are already understood in the wider world, like using red to mean "stop" and yellow to mean "warning," so they'll be easier for employees and customers to understand. Your organization may also have its own specialized system where environments, processes or even products are already color-coded. In that case, make sure that the colors you use on your safety signs remain consistent with what your organization already uses.

4. Use Content Wisely

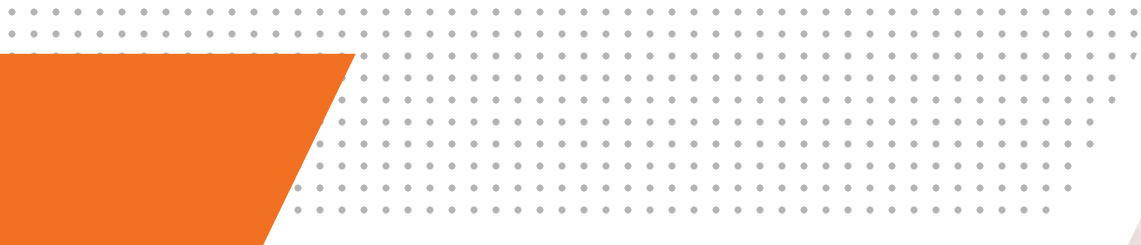
Because you have so few words to make your point on a safety sign, it's important to choose your words carefully.

The best safety signs include messages with the following tone:

- Informative: A sign that delivers an important, bite-size piece of informationo
 - Examples: Statistics, goals, training times
- Motivating: A sign that encourages employees to do the right thing and recognizes those who doo
 - Examples: Days without injury, kudos, benchmarks achieved
- Inclusive: A sign that builds a relationship between your organization and its employeeso
 - Examples: Birthdays, safety quotes, safety trivia

By following these simple tips, you can create safety signage that informs and motivates your staff. And remember, just as safety signage should evolve when changes occur in your industry, it should also be refreshed regularly to keep employees engaged.





> STEP 6: REGROUP (OFTEN) TO PREVENT REPEATING MISTAKES

Revisit your safety shortfalls over the last five years and schedule the appropriate training and refresher courses.

Though you likely addressed the issue shortly after the original incident occurred, your team may now have new members or may have forgotten how important a particular safety precaution can be. Get ahead of a potential recurrence by revisiting any problems with your staff today.

You can also use this time to incentivize your teams and leadership to actively do their part in creating and maintaining the company’s safety culture. An employee who follows the right safety protocols should be rewarded for their behaviors — after all, they are potentially saving the company from a significant loss in time, wages and productivity, raised insurance costs and more. Make sure to recognize these individuals and thank them for their important contributions.

A SAFETY-FOCUSED CULTURE

A positive safety culture can be achieved within an organization of any size, but it is not something that can be completed overnight. It should be seen as a journey of continued improvement. The journey to a true safety culture is a marathon not a sprint.

When a safety culture is implemented correctly and adopted by team members, not only will safety improve, but areas such as productivity, employee retention and even product quality will benefit.

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