



Avoid tragedies and win business by focusing “in” safety

Communication is competitive. Messages to employees come from all directions, and all senders want their message to have the greatest stickiness factor. Even within safety, much information must and could be shared, but what is most important?

In my September 2022 article in BIC Magazine, “Evolving From Focusing on — to Focusing in Safety,” I wrote about the significance of specificity and developing a focus in safety. To elucidate this important topic, here are three stories in which I took part.

Just one thing

A road construction company brought all the crews to the main yard the first week of January to help align the workforce on the new year’s safety plan and create focus. Climbing onto a piece of their equipment, the CEO began speaking. “After reviewing our injuries over the past three years, almost half fell into one category, so I’d like us to become great at just one thing. I’d like us to become great at climbing on and off our equipment.

“This is my challenge this year: let’s become great at this one thing by remembering it yourself, reminding others and helping us to identify and remove the obstacles and barriers to safely climbing on and off our equipment.”

Tragedy avoided

A papermill identified a concerning trend of actions that would likely result in a fatality or a severe injury. After reviewing data from multiple sources, individuals — especially less tenured employees — were often seen standing near suspended loads. Appropriately, the site leveraged all communication channels to get the message to all personnel at the mill. “Pay special attention to where you are standing, especially if you are near suspended loads.”

A catastrophic crane failure occurred three months later. A several-ton load swung free, destroying machine equipment. Thankfully, no one was nearby. The two union leaders championing communication firmly believed that it saved someone’s life as observations and reported

concerns had dropped drastically since communication began.

Competitive advantage

A pipeline construction firm had a dilemma: keeping the most important thing the most important thing. Its projects span North America and are, on average, nine months long. The firm staffs up the crews locally for each project. Knowing individuals on the project site wouldn’t be with the company long, the firm wanted to develop a memorable focus to get into the heads and habits of the crews in the first month onsite.

Data showed four precautions beyond the required rules, procedures and policies were necessary last-resort control points to stop the chain of events from turning out terribly. They were communicated in an acronym on banners, posters, hardhat stickers and stamped on the back of gloves, “H.E.L.P. Hand Protection — be aware of placement of hands, wear correct gloves. Eyes on Task or Path — don’t be distracted while working or walking. Line of Fire — assess direction of hazard, position out of

Line of Fire. Position of Footing — 3 points of contact, watch placement of footing.” One of the firm’s clients, a major O&G company, was so impressed by this and other creative safety efforts that it awarded the firm another project, highlighting its safety improvement efforts as a competitive advantage.

Experience demonstrates that the most critical information for individuals to know is the serious and frequent risks they will face and how to respond when they do. What does your data tell you and what percentage of the workforce knows this information? This is the importance of moving from focusing on the topic of safety to developing a focus within it.

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