



Are your supervisors cops or coaches?

A popular cartoon shows a husband and his wife sitting together having breakfast with the husband exclaiming to his wife, "I told you I loved you when we got married 17 years ago. If anything changes, I'll let you know!" You could tell she wasn't pleased with this statement. Unlike this misguided husband, we all know the importance of positive feedback in shaping relationships and desired performance, so why is it so hard to utilize this essential tool at work?

Common are stories of the super-employee thrust into a supervisory position without being provided with expectations of what his roles, responsibilities and expected results are, or the skills and confidence to fulfill them. Some people can handle this new authority, and some can't. Some people provide more corrective feedback; others are too soft. The best supervisors learn how to strike the important balance of managing consequences. Some supervisors come across as a cop; others create a coaching experience.

During a keynote I was giving to

the leaders of a utility company, I told the story of Alan, a client who attended one of our leadership safety coaching workshops. Early in his career, he was responsible for auditing his company locations for health, safety and environmental (HSE) compliance. On his third visit to one of the locations, as he entered he heard over the loudspeaker, "Charlie 2-2-3, Charlie 2-2-3." Someone was kind enough to pull him aside and explain, "Alan, you do realize that's code for HSE's on-site, HSE's on-site."

He always thought he was perceived as a coach; unfortunately, he found that was not the case. When he was first telling this story during the workshop he attended, he realized he was never provided the skills to actually coach for performance or how to give balanced feedback to facilitate desired behavior.

At the conclusion of my keynote, a group of leaders approached me to share a well-known story within their own company about a superintendent recognized as the performance cop for their organization. As linemen were working

on the poles, this superintendent would spy on them in the dark with the intention of catching someone doing something wrong and administering discipline. It turns out he would park down the road with his lights off, binoculars in hand, waiting for his opportunity. But a group of employees outwitted him. Under the guise of asking for his advice, some employees gained access to his front hood and applied reflective tape to the outside of his radiator.

From that point on, lights from oncoming cars would reflect against the front of his truck, signaling his position and rendering his tactic useless. Punishment is a behavior-extinguishing tool, not a behavior-starting tool. If someone is punished, there is no guarantee the desired behavior will fill the void of the behavior being extinguished.

Let's imagine someone is speeding and he sees a police officer ahead. He'll likely slow down and, after passing the officer, resume speeding. This is avoidance behavior. What happens if this behavior is punished with a speeding ticket? Does

the behavior forever change? Or does the driver get better at not getting caught, like by purchasing a radar detector?

Do we want employees to seek out improvement opportunities and increase their contributions to the performance of the company or get better at avoiding consequences and watching out for the supervisor? The answer should be obvious. Now, what are you doing to motivate or demotivate that? Are your supervisors perceived as cops or as coaches?

Shawn M. Galloway is the president of ProAct Safety and coauthor of several books including the bestseller, "STEPS to Safety Culture ExcellenceSM" and his new release, "Forecasting Tomorrow: The Future of Safety Excellence." He has helped hundreds of organizations within every major industry internationally achieve and sustain excellence in performance and culture. He is also the host of the highly acclaimed weekly podcast series *Safety Culture Excellence*SM.

For more information, contact Galloway at (936) 273-8700 or info@ProActSafety.com. ●

POLYSTAR
Containment

Specializing in secondary containment for:
Rail | Truck | Above Ground Storage Tanks

Star Track[®] Containment Pad[™]

Call us toll free at 800.275.3453
www.polystarcontainment.com

SMART, SAFE, EFFICIENT

ROLLNRACK[®]
HOSE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

SEE FOR YOURSELF AT ROLLNRACK.COM | 262-363-2030