

When your safety process goes stale

Assess program momentum, relevance & branding

By CHARLES J. DOUROS

In a recent safety excellence workshop, our firm facilitated a brainstorming exercise with a group of safety professionals interested in solving a particular problem they were experiencing in their safety journey. Their safety process was boring them to tears and they worried it would grow stale and become irrelevant with the workforce.

An executive searching for the best adjectives to describe the company's safety platform summed it up in this way: "We've become very ho-hum about safety."

There are many things we have become accustomed to hearing from a room full of safety professionals when they get together in our workshops, but I must say, "ho-hum," isn't one of them. Have you heard a similar message from your safety professionals? Do you worry your

safety process is stalled to a point where your employees are growing apathetic and becoming disengaged? Do you consider your safety process stale?

Perhaps you've heard from others, or even said yourself, "Our people just don't seem to care one way or the other anymore about safety." Pointing to a safety banner on the wall, your safety manager muses, "Nobody reads this stuff anymore." You conclude, "If only we had a culture where people were excited about safety."

Before conceding that your employees don't care anymore and the culture is doomed, consider assessing these key areas to shed light on whether or not your safety process is becoming ho-hum.

Momentum

When momentum shifts in safety, results inevitably follow. This is a double-edged sword: the pendulum swings both ways. Consider the football coach who, sensing a backward shift in momentum, rallies the team at half-time with an inspiring locker room speech. When momentum is positive and everyone is excited and working in concert toward safety goals, momentum feeds on itself and there is a palpable sense of pride in the workplace. The pulse, the buzz, is evident even to first-time visitors.

Not surprisingly, more often than not, key process indicators (KPIs) move in a positive direction when momentum is favorable. Conversations and behaviors that lead to a safer workplace abound. People are informally recognized for safe behaviors. Employees are more supportive and trusting of management, and voluntary participation in safety programs is rampant.

Conversely, backward momentum has the opposite effect. As momentum fades, employees can disengage and just "go through the motions" of a benign daily routine, becoming bored and apathetic toward the workplace and one another, overlooking hazards and ignoring risk. Participation in key safety initiatives drops, conversations stop, recognition halts and the workplace becomes ho-hum about safety.

Certainly it takes more than an inspiring half-time speech to keep momentum moving forward, but is it time to look at the safety momentum in your company?

Relevance

Employees want to know their efforts are not in vain and the work they do is relevant and contributing to the greater good of the organization. Executives who establish clear, sensible and relevant safety goals, and then illustrate how those workers'



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responsibilities contribute to the achievement of organizational goals, place an inherent value on employee engagement.

Human Resources professionals recognize that employees engage more when they know their work is relevant and value-added, and understand where they fit into the success of the organization. According to a 2014 SHRM Employee Satisfaction Study, employee engagement was measured, and one out of four employees in the study were less than satisfied with the contribution of their work in relation to their organization's business goals and the meaningfulness of their job.

Comparatively, does your organization have a cross-section of employees who feel disengaged from safety processes in the work-

pulse of their organizational heartbeat while monitoring and responding to shifts in momentum can promote an interesting, even innovative, safety program. When employees can connect the meaningfulness of their day-to-day work activities with the business and safety goals of the organization, they see relevance and stay engaged longer and with purpose. By giving the safety programs, processes and initiatives a familiar moniker, a brand, employees connect emotionally almost without conscious thought, favorably promoting the brand and all it stands for.

How would you rate your current momentum?
How relevant are safety activities, meetings,

training and the overall strategy?

What does your current brand say about safety?

Great safety leaders recognize they are either managing these aspects that affect their safety culture, or they're being managed by them. Safety is never something to be purposely ho-hum about. How ho-hum is your safety culture? **ISHN**

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place? Help employees connect the dots by clearly defining what safety excellence looks like in your company. Illustrate what specific behaviors they need to focus on, beyond structured compliance efforts, to demonstrate they understand the precautions necessary to perform their duties safely.

When you use data to illustrate why the behavioral expectations are in place, you provide relevance and a sense of urgency to them. Because employees want to know their efforts are not in vain, there's a better chance they'll align their behavior with the company's expectations.

Branding

What do food and beverage giants Coca-Cola and McDonalds have in common, and how does it apply to safety? They deliver a strong, recognizable brand experience to consumers, constantly evolving in order to stay interesting, contemporary and culturally relevant. There is nothing ho-hum about these immensely successful brands. They are masterful at creating interest and excitement among consumers.

For comparative purposes, consider that your employees are the customers of your safety process and imagine if your safety programs were branded in much the same way. Savvy safety professionals keep their programs from becoming ho-hum by branding their safety processes with carefully crafted messaging on company banners, placards and posters. They develop logos, letterhead and other design elements to bring familiarity and excitement to the safety process in order to keep everyone aligned.

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