



A.W.A.R.E. — Five steps to a successful safety observation

Organizations will not achieve sustained excellent results in safety without a process in place that understands risk exposure prior to an incident or injury. To accomplish this, organizations must have a coaching approach to safety and an observation framework that guides the conversation. This article outlines five steps that have been used with great success. Whether peer to peer or supervisor to worker, it is all about being A.W.A.R.E.

Announce

The first step in the process is to let the person you intend to observe know you are there. This initial contact sets the tone for the observation and resulting discussion. It is normal to wonder, "If they know I am there, they might do everything right." Wouldn't this be desirable? One of the goals should be to help create new habits, not to catch a rule violator. Another step of the methodology will reinforce this. However, if someone feels ambushed or spied on, how might trust be compromised? Make sure everyone you will observe, and even those nearby, is aware of the observa-

tion before you begin.

Watch

After the individual is aware, you should spend your designated time watching the job task. What will you look for? Ideally the answer is, "Can the employee perform the task safely?" and "Do I see anything that concerns me?" Lean behavior-based safety processes identify what safe looks like by positively defining the significant few precautions employees can take to reduce the probability of incidents. Generally this is better received than an observation attempting to determine if rules are being abided. The purpose of observations should be to identify if workers can perform the task safely and proactively identify concerns that might increase the chances of an injury. This should not be used as a faultfinding, gotcha or catch-the-rule-breaker opportunity.

Ask

One of the most important aspects of an observation is determining why a precaution was or was not taken. This insight is one of the most effective mechanisms to

affect behavior change and prioritize safety improvement initiatives. It is easy for all of us to become complacent with a task often performed. It is important the individual being observed recognizes the rationale for the decisions he is making, for both the ones that reduce risk exposure and the ones that introduce risk exposure. If you see a safe precaution being taken, or an exposure to risk, ask the most appropriate questions: Why did you do it that way? Is that the way you always do it? Do you feel safe doing it that way? Is there a safer way to do it? Were you trained to do it that way?

Reinforce

Observations are an opportunity to specifically point out the positive things a person is doing for his own safety. Emphasis should be placed on reinforcing what the worker is doing right to ensure he is not just being lucky when it comes to injury prevention. If an individual has performed a discretionary precaution while performing his work, this is an excellent time to reinforce precisely what you observed him doing, and encourage him to continue. This

helps change the common belief safe is defined by the lack of accidents rather than by what people do to control risk exposure.

Express concern

When risk is identified during an observation, the language chosen to provide feedback is critical. Expressing concern is a preferred approach over stating someone is "at risk" and "unsafe." When you choose the latter examples, your opinions are introduced into the conversation often compromising trust and respect. If an observer states concern with how a task is performed, this offers a better chance for a conversation leading to an understanding of why risk is a part of the task.

Generally, this tactic is part of a more comprehensive methodology for leadership safety coaching or lean behavior-based safety. While the structure of such approaches is certainly valuable, the A.W.A.R.E. steps of an effective observation and feedback methodology are also independently important.

For more information, contact Galloway at (800) 395-1347 or info@ProActSafety.com. ●

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BUSINESS UPDATE

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"I've been using Munoz Enterprises Inc. off and on for many years," said Roger Pruitt, a project manager for Houston Fuel Oil Terminal Co. (HFOTC). "The company has performed a lot of tank cleaning services for us from dewatering some of our new tanks to cleaning and drying out tanks for service. All I have to do is make a call and they send a crew without any delays.

"Safety is also their top priority and that's what HFOTC likes about them. Munoz's supervision, management and

equipment make the company an exceptional choice. The employees know what they're doing whether it's involving chemical or petroleum products and they are a top-notch group. Munoz is all about business and getting the job done right."

The Houston Business Roundtable recently honored Munoz with a bronze award in the specialty contractor soft crafts category for safety excellence.

"We were very pleased with Munoz's services," said John Lee, maintenance coordinator, Lubrizol Corp. "All of their employees did an outstanding job cleaning our butyl acrylate tank. I never would have dreamed you could have gotten the smell out of the metal. They did a very safe and thorough job and the jobsite was always clean from beginning to end. I can't say enough about their guys and I really enjoyed working with them. They made a stressful job a little less stressful."

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