



Behavior-based safety: Use the data or don't bother

Behaviors are performed for reasons known only to the individual. If we do not take the time to understand the reasons, you will not have the ability to change the behavior effectively. Whether realizing it or not, people occasionally take risks. More often than not, when someone becomes injured, they generally mean to be doing what they are doing but do not mean for it to result in an injury. Implementing an accident reduction process only to prompt or blame behavior is not only ineffective and poor management, but many safety professionals (along with represented work forces) view this as unethical.

There is always rationale that prompts behavior. Consider something you might have done when you were much younger that, upon reflection, leaves you wondering, "What was I thinking?" It is likely you were thinking, but you thought it would turn out a different way. Are behavior-based safety (BBS) processes focusing to identify and respond to the reason that is prompting the behavior, or just focusing on the behavior itself?

BBS is a process designed to focus on the precautions that can help prevent incidents. Many processes have expanded beyond safety to focus efforts on incidents of many kinds, such as process, operating equipment, environmental and quality. Whether safety or otherwise, one of the most critical factors that leads to success or failure is the use of the data that tells you why a risk was taken. All processes must have a team or a designated, trained individual to continually review the previous month's data to drive and focus the efforts or action plans to respond to the identified reasons the risk was taken. Absent such a plan, why bother with BBS?

A key success factor in any implemented BBS process is data management. The data is what enables continuous improvement and helps the observers "keep score." Sometimes the reason workers are not taking precautions that lead to a safe, risk-free outcome is because they don't recognize the risks. Perhaps they are in the habit of performing the task in a different way? Sometimes there is something that makes it difficult or

impossible to perform the task without any risk. Identification of safety barriers and measuring their impact is a powerful tool in improving safety. Moreover, it is the engine that drives the process.

BBS processes require an effective data management and problem-solving strategy. The data typically flows to a steering team, allowing them to quickly identify and respond to the trends in risk exposure. Additionally, a good strategy will increase the team's ability to focus corrective effort and reduce the impact on resources. Observations should not be triggered in order to meet the number of requested observations. The data should focus both the observations and action plans. When developing your data collection strategy, ensure to answer these important questions:

1. How will the data remain anonymous?
2. Who will input the data and how will the observations get to this person or group?
3. What software will you use and who will have access to it?
4. How will the team retrieve the data from the computer for their meetings?

5. What data or reports will be posted, shared or sent to management?

6. What methodologies will be used to understand, analyze and prioritize the data?

7. How will the action plans (to improve the process or safety) be tracked?

8. What key performance indicators will drive the process?

9. Who does the team work with when barriers or obstacles to safe behaviors are discovered?

The title of this article may be a bit harsh, yet I make no apologies. After experience with more than 2,000 processes, we at ProAct Safety have come to the conclusion more (well-implemented) BBS processes fail due to the lack of a data management and response strategy than anything else.

If your goal is to create an awareness campaign to drive a focus on certain behaviors, great; this has been effective in certain environments. Just don't call it BBS.

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

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