

SAFETY FIRST IT'S ALL ABOUT THE CULTURE



TruckSure

By Trevor Toohill

I have produced a couple of articles on creating the right crash free culture in your transport business and also on Health and Safety, but this issue is combining both to create the right **safety culture**.

Based on recent Worksafe data, workplace injuries happen every day. A recent study suggests that more than 50% of work-related injuries in 2015 went unreported. In an effort to increase reporting and thereby reduce accidents, new laws and guidelines and increases in penalties for failing to report work-related injuries have been introduced.

Unfortunately, intensifying rules and regulations will never be enough to prevent safety failures from occurring and build a culture of accident prevention. Safety can only be improved with the deliberate creation of safety cultures. This investment can also have profound bottom-line results.

It starts with shared beliefs and values, implemented by people, and habituated through process.

Here are a couple of thoughts on some ways you can build a *Culture of Accident Prevention*, and that is not just behind the wheel but also for your total work place.

Listen to your staff at the coal face.

Too often, we develop safety policies and best practices without the input of our employees. They are our true subject-matter experts. They know where the risks lie and who may be performing their duties in an unsafe manner. Let them have input as processes are developed. The more they own the process, the greater accountability they will have for its execution. While it is not realistic to bring in every frontline employee, consider asking your team to select a handful of their "opinion leaders" to join you in the process.

Tear down barriers. Barriers isolate departments. For purposes of safety, the most important one to attack is the one that may exist between your operations and safety teams. In a safety culture, there is a clear recognition that operations are responsible for the execution of accident prevention. Your safety professionals can teach, coach, train and create accountability. However, only the people with their hands on the levers can actually execute safe behaviours and outcomes. Don't allow any operations team members to kick safety issues back to the safety department. Ensure mutual engagement.

Hire for values and teach the technical component. Start by hiring for the right values, motivation and behaviours. You send out the wrong message when you hire just for technical skills with no focus on cultural fit. Focus your efforts on hiring employees that show they value safety as a core value, for that is something that's harder to teach. Even if you need to hire someone with a specific level of skill and experience, you can always find a candidate who is both technically excellent and in

alignment with your values. Engage several sets of eyes on a prospect. Those current employees who are most in tune with your safety culture can spot a misfit a mile away.

Maintain safety accountability. There are three types of accountability: individual, organisational and peer-to-peer. For safety excellence to occur, all three forms of accountability must be present.

Individual means an employee understands the expectations and is responsible for executing to the standards presented.

Organisational means ensuring the procedures and processes in place are effective, and if they're not, revising them.

Peer-to-peer accountability is when employees hold each other accountable for their actions. This can be the hardest to promote, but it is the most essential. Rather than moving an issue up the corporate ladder, stellar safety performance will occur when your employees turn to each other to promote positive behaviour.


Don't judge by severity. There is no such thing as a minor accident. Each accident must be investigated with the same amount of attention whether it was life threatening or not. A root-cause analysis is always essential. The minute your employees start to believe that an accident was "minor" is the minute they become complacent.

Think about the following example in your trucking company. "Hey, boss. I backed into a pole. Why is that such a big deal?" Your reply: "That pole looks to be the same size as a 5-year-old kid. If you backed over a little kid, then what conversation would we be having? The failure is in the attitude. You didn't get out and look before moving your vehicle. You just got lucky it was a pole and not a person."

Good can be bad. Good performance and an absence of accidents can promote complacency, making you unaware of actual dangers or deficiencies. The tendency to get complacent is not an uncommon trait, but if allowed to establish, it can destroy a culture of safety.

Complacency creep generally occurs silently and gradually. Vince Lombardi, a personal inspiration, said "perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection we can catch excellence."

Regardless of how long ago your last safety failure occurred, as leaders, you must constantly drive home that zero accidents is the goal and provide continuous behaviourally based training so that your employees can improve.

When it comes to implementing these ideas, start by prioritising them. Begin with easy-to-implement/high-value ideas. Safety is about behaviour, and your role as a leader is to manage it. 

As always if you feel the need to discuss www.trucksure.co.nz

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