

April 2016. A systematic path toward the goal of worker engagement, key to attaining the highest levels of safety excellence

In order to improve safety in the workplace there needs to be a strategy to help workers achieve excellence, an assessment of their current performance levels, and coaching to help workers improve from that current level. But ultimately the quantity and quality of employee engagement will determine the level of effort to move an organization toward excellent safety performance.

Strategy (envision the desired state): A clear strategy should be developed identifying what good engagement looks like (i.e., what attitudes, perceptions, values and behaviors embody this engagement in safety).

Assessment (evaluate the current state of engagement): An assessment should reveal to what extent workers already have the identified desired qualities of engagement which contribute to the strategy for engagement, as well as which qualities need to be developed or enhanced.

Coaching (how to address gaps between current and desired state): Specific areas that need to be addressed should become improvement targets. Internal coaches can focus on these targets. Trained coaches will positively reinforce the specific areas for improvement as observed and investigate why these factors are lacking when coaches observe their absence.

Engagement (buy-in by workers): Knowledge of what is influencing worker attitudes, perceptions, values and behaviors can be used to facilitate the development of the four factors of engagement, which are:

- Attitudes are resistant to direct efforts to change and are largely based on personal experience and peer influence. Changing attitudes requires trust, takes time and is best accomplished by good communication and sharing of reinforcing experiences.
- Perceptions are based on personal experience but also on available information. More and better information potentially can change perceptions.
- Values can be either universal or situational. Universal values apply in all situations. Situational values apply only in certain instances where multiple priorities might conflict. Organizations consistently must demonstrate values over time to get worker buy-in.
- Behaviors are affected by all the above factors as well as workplace conditions, leadership styles, culture and numerous other influences. Changing behaviors is best accomplished within the culture rather than through outside influences.

The highest levels of excellence tend to happen when workers truly are engaged in safety efforts. The process must begin at the strategic level and follow a systematic path toward the goal of worker engagement.

Terry L. Mathis. "*Engagement: The Fourth Component of Safety Excellence.*" EHS Today, Safety and Performance Excellence. January 29, 2016.
<http://ehstoday.com/safety/engagement-fourth-component-safety-excellence>