Brent Kahle

Teaching Safety Top to Bottom:

Using Behavior-Based Safety as the Best Method of Creating a Safety Culture

In the manufacturing community, throughout the past ten years, safety has become a bigger asset as rules and regulations have become stricter. It has become more difficult for safety professionals nationwide to push and maintain companies to comply with both Occupational Safety and Health Admiration (OSHA) laws and regulations, as well as those the companies put into place themselves. Because OSHA has been cracking down on companies, creating prosperous safety cultures in these workplaces has become necessary as they push the importance of safety into the lives of every person in the workplace. One of the best ways to create such a thriving safety culture is through behavior-based safety techniques. Behavior-based safety techniques use the everyday tasks and *behaviors* of every person in a workplace, from top to bottom, studies them, and provides scientific ways to improve their work toward the direction of safety. Such techniques are found in different manufacturing and construction settings across the nation, and are starting to find their way into even the worst safety cultures across the globe as a first attempt to strengthen their safety cultures. Behavior-based safety systems are the best method for a safety professional because they demand input from all employees, from the CEO to the hourly-wage workers, and they also place safety into the front of every person's mind every time they make a decision not only on the job floor, but also outside of the work setting.

Because it requires input from all levels of a company, businesses should enact behavior-based safety techniques because they are specifically designed to do just that. Most importantly,

though, behavior-based safety requires input from the management, or leadership, levels of the company.  Robert Pater, managing director of SSA/MoveSMART, a safety consulting company, and the author of the published book *Leading From Within*, agrees with this saying "Real, significant and sustaining cultural elevation begins with leadership, which is most efficiently harnessed on multiple levels" (24).  Pater, in his article published in the scholarly journal *Professional Safety*, believes in tackling this safety culture change by looking at each level of leadership, one at a time, starting at the top.  One way of achieving this is by looking at every department in a company, starting at the top, and working your way down the chain of command till you reach the bottom. Once a safety culture is instilled into the minds of the people in the very top of a business, the rest will trickle down more easily.  Getting leadership involved in the safety process is very important, and should be the first step.  Once leaders get a grasp of the safety culture and behavior-based safety techniques, employees will be more likely to follow than if it were the other way around, creating a behavior-based safety culture that everyone can appreciate.

Though behavior-based safety techniques are one way to attempt to create a sound safety culture, there are other ways to create the same culture, and therefore opponents have many criticisms towards the behavior-based safety system.  One of these criticisms is that many systems are never able to actually receive buy-in from management and leadership in their job facility.  According to  Michael Saujani, a retired Certified Safety Professional (CSP) and founder of his own safety consulting firm MKS Safety LLC, much of senior management is just worried about numbers, and many just "want their organizations to succeed financially and to perform optimally" (37).  Much of leadership feels that behavior-based safety techniques are expensive as they just waste time making people observe workers, when they could be working

on more financially important projects.  This idea that safety is too expensive is difficult for a safety professional because, despite this common theme found throughout most management in the nation, behavior-based safety techniques can actually save a company money in the long run. Safety is an important tool in manufacturing, and many scholars, including Saujani, are teaching companies the benefits of having safety in their workplace.

Using behavior-based safety practices can be largely beneficial from a financial standpoint as well when properly initiated by a companies' leadership teams.  In his article Saujani continues on with his financial findings, saying that the best way to get input from leadership into the safety is through a cost benefit analysis.  As management realizes that they can save money in the long run, by creating or changing the safety culture of the laborers, they will be more likely to agree to a behavior-based safety program (38).  With management on board, even if merely for financial reasons, a behavior-based safety program can finally have the power it needs to be implemented and followed by all members of operations, top to bottom.  A cost benefit analysis will, hopefully, prove a safety professional's point that safety measures can actually save a company money in the long run, especially behavior-based safety measures. Many of these analyses show that, though usually initially expensive, most safety measurements and behavior-based safety techniques implemented start saving money in just a handful of years. Since money is the language spoken by almost everyone, it shouldn't be too difficult to receive buy in from upper management after an analysis is delivered.  With the support that upper management can bring thereafter, there is a greater chance that a safety culture can blossom from these practices.  A safety culture, especially one focused around a behavior-based safety system, needs the backing of the upper management to grow and prosper, and without such nourishment

it can quickly fall apart and die, as leadership in a company is usually the deciding factor as to whether or not different ideas catch on in a company.

Another financial reason a safety professional should use when initiating a backing from corporate is to illustrate how these techniques save money as they create companies with minimal to no lost time on the job.  Joe Wheatley, a corporate director at EnPro Industries Inc. agrees with this, mentioning how the safety hierarchy places safety on an individual level with the workers.  EnPro Industries is a manufacturer of engineered products for important and precise manufacturing, and in this company Wheatley has proven himself to be a profound and outstanding safety professional.  Wheatley says that if individuals take it upon themselves to work and use 'safety best practices' an operation can reduce its lost-time which can save a company money (29).  When a company has lost-time due to injury it can cost them a lot of money.  If even just one person gets injured an entire line in a manufacturing plant may have to be put on hold until the employee is put back on the job, a replacement is found, or they find a way to do it without them.  Not only is the company losing money by not producing any products, but they may have to also pay for a person's time off work.  Behavior-based safety systems can help to reduce lost time by reducing or eliminating employee injuries.  Once people understand the power safety can have on their work, and on the work of those around them, the behavior-based safety system is working at full capacity.

Several scholars that are opponents to the behavior-based safety system, and even some that are for it, often criticize the system because the initial steps of forming it are usually quite difficult.  Even if management is on board and fully interested in the system, there still must be buy-in from the employees that do they actual construction or manufacturing.  Without employees wanting to enter into this system and take it as their own the behavior-based safety

system ultimately has no backbone, as there will be no behaviors to watch over. One way to counteract this is by creating safety incentives. Author Joe Wheatley mentions in his article that incentives can create buy-in from employees as people seem to find value in material objects (30). Many people may not initially see the benefit of any safety methods, especially behavior-based safety one, and incentives can help to get employees to participate. Once employees are hooked on safety incentives and fully entered into the behavior-based safety system, all there is left to do to receive buy-in is to slowly ween the workers off incentives, showing them the importance of safety and how they shouldn't need any extra prizes. Incentive programs work great in the behavior-based safety system, because as employees are weened off of prizes, they find that safety is actually very important, changing their safety behaviors in and around the workplace.

Though a company must start at its leadership levels to create a safety culture, it also must look at the men and women that are on the actual shop floor, the blue collar employees, who do the work. Behavior-based safety practices are unique because they are determined based on how the company already works, and how the blue collar employees perceive safety. Because these systems work not only with leadership, but also with every floor worker they are the best option to choose when a safety professional is deciding upon what safety paths to take. Pater explains how leaders need to base their practices on how their companies are, safety wise, and just try to start the companies wherever they want to start them. With this Pater says to use whatever level the company is at as a base to build on top of, rather than a box to just fill things into (25). Using the culture that is already available and in place, no matter how big or how small, as a stepping stone is the right path to take. Leadership needs to be able to take the stepping stones that are in place and build from them and grow higher, teaching new things,

rather than just continuing as they were and slowly correcting as they go. With this technique of building from wherever the company is, leadership will have a greater chance of creating a strong safety culture by using these behavioral-based techniques, and will see the safety culture thrive on all levels of a company.

Another criticism to behavioral-based safety systems is that in order to receive buy in from the shop workers, safety professionals may have to set prizes and give incentives to get the safety culture they desire. These prizes are given out to people for any number of reasons, depending on how the safety professional sets up their system. Pater talks in his article about how safety professionals should be wary of keeping the same principals, but just giving prizes for the people just because they are doing what they are supposed to be doing. He asks his audience, "Would better PPE or visual acuity or incentives alone truly steer your company to the promised safety land" (24). Though incentive programs do allow for more people to finally get involved in safety, and bring in some people that normally would not participate, it is criticized because many of the participants are in on the safety culture for the wrong reasons. A true safety culture's employees go above and beyond the call of safety not because of prizes or gimmicks, but because they know that it is for the best for their and others health and safety. Incentives don't truly make a safety culture, a safety culture is about learning and growing, safety wise, in a company, and keeping safety in the idea of safety in the front of people's minds at all times.

Behavior-based safety systems work well because not only do they work with both management and shop workers, they bring every person, no matter pay rate or job title, to become a leader in safety. Based on this is Wheatley's work in safety leadership. Wheatley says that behavior-based safety systems make everyone accountable, both management and workers. When everyone is held to a higher standard, and not just upper management, it brings out the

leader in everyone to ensure that not only they stay safe, but that they are aware of the people and environment around them and that they ensure others are safe too (28-29). This model of safety is important because once everyone is a leader and is accountable for their, and others, actions, many finally decide that it is time to turn their work live around and to make usefulness out of it. Although the old saying goes that you cannot have too many chiefs and not enough indians, that form of thinking doesn't apply here. If there are just a bunch of followers (indians) then there will be nobody to speak out when something is not right, and a sustainable safety culture cannot form. An ideal safety culture needs the leadership of every person in a company to thrive, and behavior-based safety is the key to unlock that door.

One of the best ways to teach of safety culture, to the men and women on the shop floor, through behavioral-based safety techniques is by mentoring. Mentoring programs can be easily executed in the behavior-based safety system, so therefore these systems should be used in almost all situations. Mentoring these men and women, as shown by Trish Ennis, to form a safety mindset would be vital as it brings them to the front of the safety push in a company. Ennis, a CSP and the former ASSE (American Society of Safety Engineers) President, says that mentoring is good because it connects workers to people that will help them to "receive work and career guidance, make professional guidance, and gain insight based on the mentor's experience" (8). This guidance that floor workers can receive not only helps them to become more informed and aware of safety in their work and home lives, but helps the mentor themselves to gain credibility as a safety professional. The mentor, now with evidence of their work done by the mentee, can prove their work in the behavior-based safety system, and can continue mentoring others to create even more bonds and greater credibility. The mentee's new education is helpful on two different levels, first they now become more safety aware and think

differently about the work they and others around them do, and secondly they themselves can now become mentors. Once the mentee uses their new knowledge out on the shop floor they can use the new experience to help engage others into the safety culture. As soon as such a process has begun, a safety culture can start to finally come into the picture and can blossom into the culture that a safety professional is striving to achieve.

The point of a behavior-based safety system in a work setting is that it puts safety into the minds of all management and laborers. The goal is to put safety into people's minds, and have it as their first instinct when they act. Tim Page-Bottorff, a CSP, former President of the Arizona Chapter of ASSE and former ASSE Region II Vice President, agrees with this saying "[Safety] [h]abits allow individuals to perform routine behaviors without needing to make small decisions every step of the way" (42). Page-Bottorff, here, believes that behavioral-based safety techniques can help to put safety first in our minds, and to make it a normal thing to participate in a safety culture. Once safety becomes habitual for people, it makes creating a safety culture much easier, and maintaining one even easier than that. Later in his work Page-Bottorff continues with his habitual safety lesson by adding that "Everyone has the basic skill (…) what is missing is the ingrained patterns that help them engage in these behaviors on a habitual basis" (43). Behind this Page-Bottorff believes that it takes perseverance to create habitual safety. He believes that anyone can do the safe thing when told to, but the hard part is getting people to do the safe thing even when not explicitly told to and when not being watched. The true test of a safety culture is to see how its participants react when not under constant supervision. The culture achieved from habitual safety is a culture that any safety professional would be happy to call their own.

Initiating a safety culture using behavioral-based safety techniques is vital to a company because it not only creates a safety mindset in a work setting, it also teaches employees to use their safety skill at home too.  Mitch Ricketts' work corresponds to this saying that people believe stories they hear about safety mishaps and can apply them to their own lives.  Rickett, Ph.D., CSP and assistant professor of safety management at Northeastern State University believes behavior-based safety systems can teach people, using stories, how to behave inside and outside of the work sphere of their lives.  There is an art to storytelling and "the best stories explain and highlight key message points without creating distractions" (51-54).  When employees can relate to the stories, both at home and at work, they begin to feel that is their duty to protect themselves from different safety dangers.  Stories bring a personal touch to people's lives as they feel that the same dangers can happen to them as they did to those in the stories.  Behavior-based safety systems allow for training methods such as these stories to help as learning tools in their programs.  These systems thrive off of the caring hearts of the employees that are in the audience in order to work and to show the employees how important a safety culture really can be to their lives.

Just as we have different spheres in our lives, work, family and friends, a safety culture has different spheres, parts, or quadrants, to it too.  Wheatley introduces this as a way to roll Behavioral, System, Cultural, and Intentional all into one safety culture, and by also making it both for individual and community as well as both inside and outside of the safety realm. Wheatley calls this system his EnPro Organizational Model which has safety culture right in the center.  Each quadrant has different aspects of safety ranging such as the Cultural quadrant, the Systems quadrant, Behavioral quadrant, and the Intentional quadrant (30).  Each quadrant is a different aspect of the safety culture and represents how every person, from leadership down to

laborers, has their own impact on safety. This binding system Wheatley has created uses the four different quadrants to mesh together and form a strong safety culture. The Behavioral quadrant focuses more on individual behaviors, and how each person can do their part. This is where the safety first mindset comes into play. The Systems quadrant would have to deal with different safety systems, and programs implemented. Here is where leadership and general laborers meet up in the safety realm. In the Cultural quadrant this is where the safety culture would take place. Here the safety culture is constantly looking to improve each and every person and making it their job to stay safe. Finally in the Intentional quadrant here is where leadership and management work to create safety on a higher level. Management, here, works to make sure everyone at the top levels of a company understand safety so that they can relay it to the lower general workers at a facility.

The safety culture of a company is only as good as the safety professional that is leading it, and the best safety professionals implement behavior-based safety concepts into their workplace. Safety of employees is one of the most important aspects of a company because without worker safety there would not be anyone around to do the work of the company. A behavior-based safety system is the best method for attacking safety systems because it doesn't just focus on one group or person to do all the safety work, it places the bulk of the work on every individual in the company to step up and work for safer work places and no injuries or deaths. Because it scientifically observers how people work, a behavior-based system truly is the best system as it focuses both on each individual person as they work, as well as the company as a whole to be mindful of each other and of the different processes around them.

Works Cited

Ennis, Trish. "Mentoring Helps Shape our Profession's Future." *Professional Safety.* 60.6

(2015): 8. Print

Page-Bottorff, Tim. "The Habit of Safety." *Professional Safety.* 60.2 (2016): 42-43. Print

Pater, Robert. "Advanced Culture Change Leadership." *Professional Safety.* 60.9 (2015): 24-26.

Print

Ricketts, Mitch. "Using Stories to Teach Safety Practical, Research-Based Tips." *Professional*

*Safety.* 60.5 (2015): 51-57. Print

Saujani, Michael. "World Class Safety Culture Applying the Five Pillars of Safety." *Professional*

*Safety.* 60.2 (2016): 37-41. Print

Wheatley, Joe. "Leading Organizational Change With Safety." *Professional Safety.* 60.8 (2015):

28-31. Print