

Why Do Employees Choose to Get Hurt?

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"Nonchalance" is a greater hazard than a lack of training or experience. Seventy percent of the workplace fatalities I have handled were due to errors by well-trained employees. Some were driven by the desire to take care of the job as swiftly as possible. Others figured that they had successfully "done it before." Others apparently just didn't think.

Every workplace has a "safety culture," which either encourages or discourages safe behavior. The problem is that we may not know if our culture is good or bad. As a first step, we should survey employees about their attitudes. We may not like what we learn. One survey of thousands of skilled craft workers found that 90 percent felt that the company was at risk of a death or serious injury because of: "un-discussable incompetence" of a co-worker or attitudes of "just get it done," "just this once," "this safety stuff is overboard," or "be a team player." Are you surprised to learn that two out of three of the surveyed employees then confessed that they would not address a co-worker's unsafe actions, such as a failure to tie off?

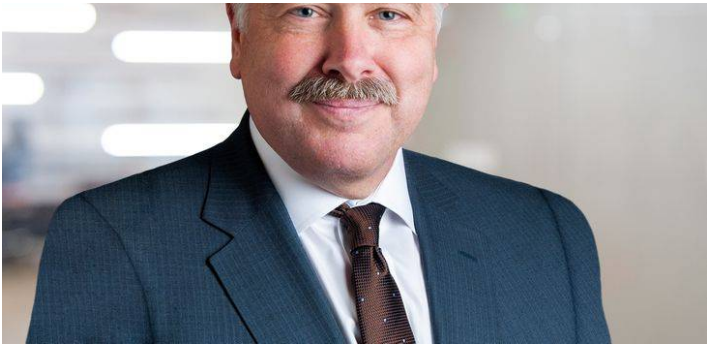
You already know that management establishes the safety culture through its actions. Yet how many of you are daily engaged in your safety processes and set the same sort of specific mile markers that you establish for production, cost control, or opening new markets? I have almost never met a CEO who did not sincerely believe that "safety is our number one goal," but this belief may show an ignorance of what's actually happening on the job site.

Employees also act unsafely because they are "involved," not "engaged." "Involvement" is taking part in safety activities. "Engagement" is taking ownership and doing things because the employee sees value; not because he or she has to do so. Employees act unsafely when safety planning is not integrated into work planning on a daily and even a task-by-task basis.

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Howard A. Mavity

Partner

404.240.4204

Email