



How Would Coach Nick Saban Handle an OSHA Inspection? Lessons for Employers from the Crimson Tide's Championship Football Coach

Insights

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September has arrived. That can only mean one thing: it's time for college football!

Labor Day weekend offered several high-profile games for our viewing pleasure. Number-one ranked Alabama won one of those contests, with the Crimson Tide overwhelming Southern California by the score of 52-6. Alabama looked well-prepared and disciplined in its lopsided victory over a ranked opponent, showing once again why its coach Nick Saban is likely the best in college football.

Coach Saban's unprecedented success - having won five career national championships, including four out of the last seven - is the result of his unparalleled work ethic and a commitment to excellence even the CEO of a Fortune 500 company would envy. Indeed, his processes transfer well to the corporate world and some companies attempt to mimic what Saban has developed at Alabama. His attention to detail could create a successful environment at any business.

Employers can learn from Saban's methodical determination to succeed. His model provides employers an example on how to, among many other things, institute programs to handle adversity and challenges that arise in the workplace.

Following Saban's routine of working hard, staying focused, teaching discipline, and developing character could help any employer prepare for unexpected events like a workplace accident or visit by a government compliance agency, such as the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

Given what we know about the habits that led to his success as a football coach, here's how Saban - if employed as a safety supervisor - might handle the difficult tasks of developing a culture of workplace safety and responding to an OSHA inspection:

Pre-Game Preparation- Before OSHA Arrives

1. Be Prepared. No coach prepares like Nick Saban. Saban rarely loses a game for which he had additional time to prepare. In fact, he has never lost a national championship game, which generally does not take place until several weeks after the end of the regular season. Safety Supervisor Saban

would have his company extremely prepared for any government agency visit, including an OSHA inspection. He would take the proactive approach of creating robust safety programs, rigorous training techniques, and a culture of accountability. He would not wait until after OSHA arrived to take these steps.

2. Challenge the (Safety) Program. Coach Saban loves for his team to play top-notch opponents, especially early in the season. Stiff competition challenges his team and only makes it better. He currently employs 21 consultants - in addition to his coaching staff - to analyze the quality of his program at Alabama. Safety Supervisor Saban would have consultants from top safety companies and safety professionals from competitor companies review his safety program and give feedback on how to make it better. He would listen to and learn from these consultants in an effort to develop new techniques and continuously improve safety in his workplace.

First Half - The Opening Conference with OSHA

3. Take Charge and Speak for the (Safety) Team. Coach Saban prohibits his assistant coaches from speaking to the media on behalf of the program. If you have a question about the Alabama football team, you ask Coach Saban. If OSHA arrived for an inspection, Safety Supervisor Saban would instruct his employees not to speak to any OSHA representative until he arrived. OSHA could only meet with the head of the safety program prior to beginning its inspection. This would ensure proper, and knowledgeable communication is delivered on behalf of the company.

4. Know the (OSHA) Rules. Coach Saban understands the rules of college football. In fact, he often questions why other coaches aren't following them, or why certain rules should be changed. He is a student of the game. Safety Supervisor Saban would know not only the OSHA safety regulations, but the procedures OSHA must follow when conducting an inspection. He would understand, for instance, that regardless of the reason OSHA appears at your door, if you consent to the inspection without limiting the review to the stated-reason OSHA is there (e.g., hazard alleged in a complaint), most arguments relating to the scope of the inspection are lost. Saban would know what OSHA can and cannot do, and require the agency to follow its procedures.

Second Half - OSHA's Walk-Through and Interviews

5. (Make OSHA) Focus on the Task at Hand. Coach Saban refuses to allow certain team personnel to speak on the headsets worn by coaches during the game. He believes any additional conversation is unnecessary and a waste of time. He also requires his players to focus on each individual play and attempt to execute it without error. Saban generally prohibits players and coaches from discussing the score at any point during the game. He believes that if you take care of each play, the score will take care of itself. While walking through his facility with OSHA during an inspection, Saban would require OSHA to focus solely on the reason why it is there. If OSHA is there for a complaint on a press-machine, OSHA would inspect the press-machine- nothing else. There would be no discussion of any other matters.

6. Tell the Truth and Don't Make Excuses. Coach Saban doesn't like excuses. Win or lose; he generally gives the other team credit for their excellent play; he doesn't blame the referees. He also requires his players to be honest. Saban believes honesty is a crucial character trait. Safety Supervisor Saban would require his employees to tell the truth if interviewed by OSHA. If there is a safety issue, he would instruct them to not hide it or make excuses. Honesty is the only policy.

Post-Game - After the Penalties

7. Learn from Mistakes. Saban doesn't always win. When he loses, however, he allows that experience to be an opportunity to learn. Rarely does Saban lose to the same team twice in one season, or more than one year in a row. If Safety Supervisor Saban received a citation, he may contest it if plausible defenses existed. More importantly, however, he would learn from the experience and rigorously reassess and evaluate his safety program with respect to the alleged hazard in order to improve.

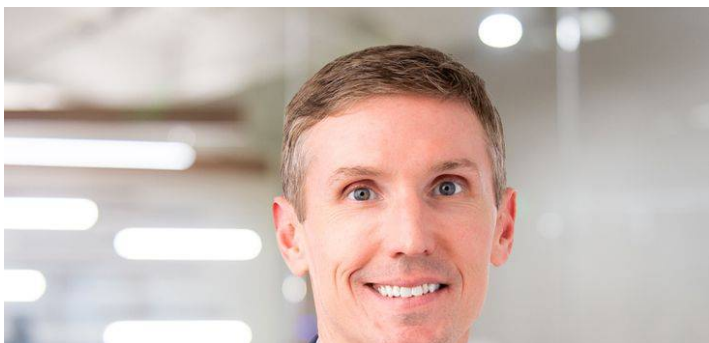
8. Above All, Be Professional. Coach Saban is a professional. He generally refrains from yelling or swearing on the sidelines, and treats others with respect in both victory and defeat. Safety Supervisor Saban would understand that employers and OSHA are on the same page from a mission standpoint. They want to keep employees safe. Being abrasive or unprofessional is not the demeanor that will help accomplish this goal. Saban would realize the importance of remaining cordial throughout the inspection process.

Coach Saban's success is the product of habits that could produce results on and off the football field. Employers can learn from accomplished leaders like him.

When determining how to improve your safety program, consider what has led to success for others, even if that success occurred outside your industry. Think outside the box. This innovation and critical evaluation will lead to results.

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Travis W. Vance
Regional Managing Partner
704.778.4164
[Email](#)