



Don't Let Your "Safety Minutes" Become Routine

Insights

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Many companies open certain meetings with a "*Safety Minute*." Often, the home office develops weekly or daily Safety Minutes for crews to use at pre-work meetings. Ideally, the Company's leadership requires other meetings to open with a Safety Minute. Some companies mandate that all meetings open with a Safety Minute. Given our society's fixation with meetings, we could be talking about a great many Safety Minutes.

These Safety Minutes are different from Tool Box Talks or similar daily or weekly efforts that may be used to convey more detailed training or refresh employees on issues involving Lock Out, Fall Protection, PPE, etc. We're focusing on behavior and habit.

Routine is the Enemy.

The problem with many safety efforts is that they become routine and are carried out without much contemplation. We've all seen pencil-whipped Daily Inspection forms, Site Safety Analysis and Daily Log entries.

Safety Minutes are designed to make one pause and think about safety. Yes, we want to emphasize a specific topic, but the goal is to get employees to be mindful of safety and to inculcate safety into that day's actions. We are not looking for rote compliance.

Got to Start at the Top.

All safety efforts seem to lead back to top Company leadership backing and setting an example. Management makes actions important that are important to their boss. And employees unerring recognize when a safety effort is an orphan un-championed by top leadership. Why bother?

So it has been a pleasure in recent weeks to work with a sophisticated national specialty contractor who's CEO opens all of our strategy meetings by either offering a Safety Minute or by asking managers in attendance to do so. Attendees range from the Chairman to Division Leaders, Safety Leadership and the VP of HR.

Focus on Safe Behaviors at Home and at Work.

The Safety Minutes proffered by the CEO are focused on behavior outside of work, a focus with which I heartily concur. We can't limit our focus to the workplace and draw an artificial boundary between work and home life. In order to get employees (and ourselves) to instinctively and continuously think

about how to safely do their jobs, we must address habits and even muscular memory. We're trying to create "good" habits.

One meeting's Safety Minute focused on safely using ladders at home. I cannot possibly be the only professional in the safety universe who has cut corners on ladder placement when cleaning gutters and almost met my maker ... or an angry wife if I survived. The CEO asked about whether I was requiring contractors working at my home to properly tie off and work safely. I responded that my contractor was quite good but that I had shocked him by correcting some scaffolding set-up.

Another day, the head of Labor Relations and Safety talked about the dangers caused by wet roads as Fall approaches and we encounter slippery leaves on the roads. I'd suggest that a company could do Safety Minutes on vehicle issues for months without exhausting the topics. Some of my safest clients have still been rocked by the loss of valued employees in off duty accidents. The number of workplace deaths pales in comparison to deaths on the road.

Make it Personal.

With my background in fighting and experience dealing with workplace security and violence, I'd inevitably bring up security concerns in day-to-day life. After all, I paid for my wife and some female protégés to attend two-days of self-defense training. Women enjoy and often excel in hard realistic self-defense training. If you provide this training, watch how the women strike and kick the hapless "assailant" in drills. The "enthusiasm" with which women wail on the faux assailant will bring home to you that almost every woman knows of someone who has been assaulted or harmed. Ideally, provide refresher training – sound familiar? You want to instill situational awareness and muscle memory on a few simple but effective responses. Much like our safety training.

And people like stories to which they can relate, especially if the storyteller did something foolish and used their own adventures for a teachable moment.

Safety Minutes and Texts.

One manufacturing client's safety personnel conduct walk arounds throughout the week and text observations to every supervisor with a cell phone. Each day, the supervisors receive an observation of a problem and are required to themselves devise a Safety Minute based on that hazard.

Challenge Frontline Supervision.

We underestimate the ability of frontline supervisors to customize and personalize Safety Minutes, Tool Box talks, or weekly refresher training. If the supervisors are uncomfortable with this approach, work with them, provide examples and support. We should be providing this sort of mentorship on many subjects, but we're so busy that such development falls through. The lack of practical training and mentorship of frontline supervisors is probably the main cause of discrimination claims and union drives.

I read a quote in a 2014 *Safety and Health Magazine* article which summed up the problem:

"I had an uncle who was a timber faller for many years. After he retired, I remember him telling my father, 'I worked for this company for 35 years, and they hired me from the neck down. They could have had the rest if they'd just asked.'"

I have not written anything unique. Many of you know a great deal about developing Safety Minutes and their role in developing a sound safety culture. Nevertheless, I see far more sloppy jobs with Safety Minutes than effective employment. And hey, we all need to be reminded to refresh and spice things up!

Howard