



## Now Let's Find Out Why Employees Make Those Bad Decisions.

Insights

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A few days ago, I ended my analysis of "why workers choose to get injured or killed," by proposing that as a possible first step to learn the answer, employers should determine their unique safety "culture." Attorneys like us can analyze an employer's safety management processes, but an often overlooked tool is to conduct an employee safety attitude survey.

### A FEW WARNINGS

1. Expect to be surprised and probably troubled by results.
2. Supervisor answers usually differ markedly from employee perceptions.
3. Any time one surveys employees, you create an "expectation," so don't set the survey results on a shelf and forget about it.
4. In determining your existing culture – you may be startled by what you learn.

As an example, 93% of construction employees in one survey said that their Company was currently at risk of an injury or death caused by one of five (5) avoidable workplace behaviors....

*"Get it Done"*

*"Un-discussable Incompetence"*

*"Just this Once"*

*"This is overboard"*

*"Are you a team player"*

**And 50% said that they had already seen an injury or death caused by one of the above five issues....**

**Even more troubling, despite these concerns, only 25% of the employees surveyed said that they would confront a co worker acting unsafely or speak up about a hazard.** In other words, only one in four would tell a coworker to put on their fall protection! Even after expressing their fear that they or their co-workers were at risk of serious injury. And I've seen this all too often. Why?

So let's find out ... review the examples of *"Employee Survey Questions,"* and ask yourself...

- How would your employees answer some of the following questions?
- How would you and other managers answer these questions?

- How would you and other managers answer these questions?
- Would you be willing to bet a steak dinner that the answers are the same for both groups?

**Sample Questions** (Answer by: “Agree/Disagree/Strongly Agree/Strongly Disagree”)

*We practice on the job what is in our Corporate Safety Policy.*

*I always receive job-specific training.*

*Supervisors hold us to safety rules.*

*Contractors on site work safely.*

*All of our people are trained before they start work.*

*We talk about safety at every meeting.*

*I hold coworkers accountable for safety.*

*Safety is the number one priority in my mind when working each day.*

*Management clearly considers the safety of employees of great importance.*

*I am sure that it is only a matter of time until I am involved in an accident.*

*Sometimes I am not given enough time to get the job done safely.*

*I am involved with safety issues at work.*

*This is a safer place to work than other companies where I have worked.*

*I am strongly encouraged to report unsafe conditions or near misses.*

*At my site, management turns a blind eye to safety issues at times.*

*Some safety rules and procedures do not need to be followed to get the job done safely.*

*Some safety rules and procedures are not really practical.*

*It is necessary to let safety slide a little in real life.*

*Safety is one of the first things upper management talks about when they come on site.*

*Upper management seldom comes on the floor.*

*Upper management is involved in safety training.*

*Upper management is involved in new employee orientation.*

*Our safety record is one of the top two things to owners.*

*Upper Management often mentions safety in company communications.*

Employee attitudes and “culture” will not change merely by utilizing consultants and all of the new and cool emerging safety ideas. Management must really decide to make safety a priority, set specific goals, use financial incentives/disincentives for managers, come with ideas to engage employees, **and then keep on it.** Changing reporting relationships so that the chief company safety manager reports directly to the CEO or COO is an important symbolic and practical step... but what will leadership do next week? Next month?

**Continuous Quality Improvement** in safety processes is another way of saying that a safety plan can never stay the same – employees lose their attention and everyone becomes nonchalant (remember my last post about unwise choices?). See too, this excellent article, *Building a Bridge To Safety Excellence: the Role of Culture*.

Safety guru, James Roughton recently posted an article by Terry Mathis, entitled, *There Is No Stasis In Safety: Safety Culture Excellence*, which does a fine job of explaining that one has to keep trying new things and keeping the program fresh. I'll end with a quotation from their article:

*There are two strategies in safety that don't work; one is doing nothing and the other is trying to maintain the status quo. The sad truth is that safety is constantly either getting better or getting worse.*

What do you think?

Howard

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