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Fire up your safety ambassadors

Senior leaders cannot send mixed signals about safety

As I think of the word ‘ambassador’ a number of images come to mind along with additional words to describe what I would expect from such a person.

To me, this role requires a knowledgeable, caring person with true integrity who assists others to engage safely and effectively with the organization the ambassador represents.

The ASSE organization volunteers do this very well at local, national and international conferences and events. Additionally, the safety professionals in the workplace need to go beyond being just enforcers of the rules. Sure, there is an obligation to insist on people acting correctly. But what about providing personal training to those who need to improve their performance? The safety pro ambassador must live these and other valued examples of a personal safety culture.

Earning status

An excellent safety culture has other classes of safety ambassadors. Another important type lives in a cubical or office in a different part of the organization’s hierarchy.

How does a non-line leader-manager earn his/her safety ambassador status? By providing the support it takes for the organization to win the zero -injury safety culture battle at the front lines. When they visit where the action is they need to be both genuinely knowledgeable and supportive of the mission. The upper level manager has to put forth visible, viable effort to earn the title of safety ambassador from the troops for whom he or she is responsible; emails, bulletin board announcements and policy statements are not enough. Visible upper management commitment to safety excellence and support thereof are necessities.



There are no secrets

These kinds of professional safety and upper management support people are what make it possible for the front line leader-supervisor to stay focused on safety the same way they would for their other job one responsibilities, like cost, quality and customer service. There are no secrets in an organization. Supervision quickly knows the reality of an organization’s safety culture by all the verbal and non-verbal messages they receive from the safety pros and upper management. It is hard for a supervisor to be a safety ambassador when the organization’s leadership and technical talent sends and rewards a mixed message.

The bottom line for being a safety ambassador certainly rests on the shoulders of the hourly employees actually doing the work. These folks are most at risk for injury. They have all the pressures coming down on them from above. Every day, the hourly employees make a continual series of personal risk assessments which eventually pay out in injury statistics.

Once again, support from above makes a huge difference in the organization’s ability to deliver final safety numbers and real safety culture excellence. However, at the bottom rung of the ladder, where work actually takes place, each individual worker must be his/her own safety ambassador. The hourly employee must become the knowledgeable, caring person with integrity who assists others to engage safely and effectively with the organization’s other output requirements. **ISHN**

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