

TITLE: 2808 READY, WILLING & ABLE

LENGTH: 24 MINUTES

PRODUCTION YEAR: 2008

PROGRAM SYNOPSIS:

Employees being ready, willing and able to give and accept constructive safety feedback is one of the most powerful and effective ways to improve workplace safety. In this unique presentation, Safety Professional Tom Harvey encourages viewers to have the confidence and courage to engage in a constructive safety conversation when a safety problem arises. He also reviews the guidelines that we all should follow once we make the commitment to get involved in the feedback process. Real-world examples of workers communicating with one another are used to illustrate how positive reinforcement is a far better method of encouraging safe behavior than giving negative feedback and criticism.

Topics include committing to never condoning unsafe acts, the principles of constructive feedback, accepting rather than receiving feedback, giving feedback to anyone regardless of position or title and common pitfalls to avoid when communicating with others.

SHOOTING LOCATION: A variety of industrial and construction job sites as well as an employee meeting room

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES: After watching the program, the participant will be able to explain the following:

- Why we all should commit to never condone an unsafe act;
- How to give constructive safety feedback positively and effectively;
- How to accept feedback by focusing on the conversation rather than making excuses;
- What some of the common safety conversation pitfalls are and how to rectify them;
- Why employees should be willing to give feedback to anyone, not just peers and co-workers.

INSTRUCTIONAL CONTENT:

BACKGROUND

- Constructive safety feedback is people talking to each other about safety; however, in real world situations, employees talking to each other about safety can often be difficult and not at all constructive.
- The reason it's difficult is that we may not know how to do it well and it can make us feel uncomfortable.
- First, you have to be ready to recognize and take advantage of your opportunities to give safety feedback; second, it's critical that you are willing—you have to want to listen and respond; and, third you must be able—you need to know how to give and accept in a constructive manner, where helpful benefits are the result.

CONDONING UNSAFE BEHAVIOR

An example is shown in which Don is working on a machine that should be locked out but isn't. Two co-workers walk by and notice that the machine is only turned off at the disconnect, but walk off without making any effort to speak to Don as he services the machine. Soon afterward, a maintenance worker walks by the machinery and switches the disconnect back on and Don is pulled into the action and gears of the machine when it starts up.

- This is an example of "condoning." When you condone, you give tacit approval; by your silence, you approve the behavior.
- Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "One who condones evil is just as guilty as the one who perpetrates it."
- When you see an unsafe practice or an unsafe situation involving any person, regardless of their position and don't speak up, you are destroying the value of safety.
- Once you commit to never condone, you make the choice that safety is a personal value; truly, you are ready and willing to accept constructive safety feedback because you want to, not because you have to.

PRINCIPLES OF CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

- Show your respect for others: build their confidence and self-esteem.
- Demonstrate your desire to make things better: remain focused on problem-solving and positive outcomes that will improve the safety process.
- Focus on the situation, issue or behavior, not the individual: you must not let a person's reputation or past agreements taint your view of the safety conversation.
- Manage your emotions; remain calm and collected: it's human nature to feel defensive when someone else comments on your work or becomes angry. Overcome this impulse by remaining calm and collected so a conversation, rather than a confrontation, can take place.
- Whether you are giving or accepting constructive safety feedback, always follow these fundamental principles because they are the key to working with others to solve any type of problem, not just safety problems.

GUIDELINES FOR GIVING SAFETY FEEDBACK/POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

- When giving constructive safety feedback, first convey your positive intent; be sincere and open. (Example: Boss thanks forklift operator for wearing seatbelt and tells him he appreciates his safety efforts.)
- Describe exactly what you've observed. (Example: Boss thanks worker for having a clean and organized work area and taking pride in her work.)
- State the effect of the behavior or action. (Example: Boss tells forklift operator, "It carries a lot of weight when everyone sees an experienced driver like you setting the right example.")
- Listen for a reaction or ask for a response. (Example: Forklift operator thanks boss and tells him he "just tries to do what's right.")
- All these are examples of positive reinforcement. There's no shortage of negative feedback and criticism, but giving positive reinforcement is a far better way to encourage continued safe behavior.

GIVING CONSTRUCTIVE SAFETY FEEDBACK

To serve as an example of giving constructive safety feedback, we revert back to the two employees who walked by Don as he serviced the machine. This time the co-workers stop with one asking the other if Don is doing something wrong. The second worker replies that the machine's disconnect isn't locked out and he goes to talk to Don about it.

- To give constructive safety feedback, first be sure to convey your positive intent; be sincere and open. (Example: The worker says to Don, "I know you've worked on that machine 1,000 times, but I just noticed a safety issue and I thought I should point it out. I'd hate to see anything happen to you.")
- Next, describe what you saw. (Example: The worker continues, "I noticed the disconnect switch for this machine isn't locked out and the maintenance you are doing places your hands and arms near the machine's gears.")
- The worker only stated what he had observed. He did not say, "Don, you knucklehead! You're doing it all wrong. Why didn't you lock it out first?" This would violate one of the fundamental principles of constructive safety feedback: focus on the situation, issue or behavior, not the individual; don't make it personal.
- Next, state the effect of the behavior or action. (Example: The worker tells Don that if the machine isn't locked out, someone could turn the machine on "and with your hands near all those gears, things could be messy.")
- Then, listen for a reaction or ask the other person to respond. (Example: "That's how I see it, but what do you think?" the worker asks Don.)
- Getting a response is important. After all, a conversation must be two-way, and as a giver of safety feedback, we also have to listen if we expect a positive outcome.
- Since we will be seeking a change of behavior or condition, we must add the following critical step: discuss until agreement is reached on the best solution. (Example: Don and his co-worker discuss the situation with Don finally agreeing that locking out the machine is the best way to prevent the machine from starting up.)

ACCEPTING CONSTRUCTIVE SAFETY FEEDBACK

- Whenever someone takes the opportunity to give safety feedback someone else has the opportunity to accept it.
- Accepting, as opposed to receiving, implies a willingness to welcome feedback as an opportunity to learn and grow, even if you disagree, even if they are wrong and even if they tick you off with their poor delivery.
- It doesn't matter if it is your bad mood or their bad delivery, focus on the content, not the personality traits of the giver.
- When you have an opportunity to respond, a good first comment is to acknowledge the other person's concerns and clarify the feedback. (Example: A worker notices Hal using a tool plugged into an extension cord draped across a wet floor. He brings the lack of a GFCI on the cord to Hal's attention and Hal responds, "So you think the extension cord running across the wet floor is creating an electric shock hazard?")
- As the conversation progress, avoid defending or over-explaining; discuss until agreement is reached on the best solution.
- It's natural to be defensive and spout out an excuse to try to justify an unsafe act, but it's not constructive. (Example: Hal responds, "Look, I do this all the time; I've never been shocked. I've never even felt a tingle!")
- That type of excuse isn't helpful or productive. Instead of making excuses, focus the conversation on a solution. (Example: Hal tells the co-worker that while a GFCI would make the job safer, re-routing the cord out of the area would also probably work.)
- Always be sure to thank the giver for working with you in a constructive manner. (Example: After Hal's co-worker explains company policy requires a GFCI regardless, they decide he will go get a GFCI while Hal re-routes the cord. "Thanks for your help; I learned something new today," says Hal.)

We now replay the earlier example with Don and his co-worker at the machine. After the co-worker explains why the machine should be locked out, he asks Don, "That's how I see it, but what do you think?" Don says he appreciates the co-worker's concern and asks him if he thinks that the job requires a complete lockout even though the disconnect is in his line of sight. The co-worker says yes and asks, "Unless you know a better way to keep the machine from starting with you inside it other than the lockout." Don says he doesn't and explains that he didn't see the need at first, but now it had become obvious. He then thanks the co-worker for looking out for him.

COMMON SAFETY CONVERSATION PITFALLS

We now examine several scenarios where safety conversations can go wrong and how to get them back on track. In the first example, Jason, neglects to lockout his machine to remove material each time it jams because he is "hot, tired and running behind in my work." Co-worker Mary Alice notices the situation and tells Jason, "I just noticed a safety issue and I want to help. I noticed your hand getting close to the machine's action while it's still running." Jason responds by saying, "I've been operating this machine for 12 years. You need to mind your own business and leave me alone. I've got to get my work done."

In the second example, Brandon brings a saw to a worker while staying just outside an area where hardhats are required. He is approached by a co-worker who asks, "Brandon, where's your hardhat? Are you trying to knock us out of the running for the safety prize or are you just a moron?"

In example number three, a trainee observes a veteran co-worker standing on a ladder that is placed on top of a scaffold and says, "Mr. Butch, excuse me. I think I see a safety problem and I'd like to offer a suggestion."

- We have just seen three common examples of safety conversations getting off to a bad start. What can we do to turn them around?
- In the case of the poor acceptor (Jason), the giver should stay calm and persistent, remembering the principles of constructive safety feedback. You can't give up and allow the unsafe action. (Example: Jason says, "Mary Alice just kept talking to me in a friendly way about the hazards of the machine and how a heat of the moment decision could hurt me forever...her persistence gave me the time I needed to calm down and make a good decision.")
- Not everyone will approach us in the perfect manner. You have to look past the poor delivery and focus on the specific safety issue rather than the personality of the giver. As the acceptor, you may have to be the calming influence to allow the conversation to continue constructively. (Example: Brandon responds to the co-worker who confronted him about his hardhat, "Calm down. I think you're trying to tell me something important, but you're a little out of control. I'm outside the danger zone; no hardhat required.")
- When faced with intimidation, many people make the mistake of prejudging someone's unwillingness to accept constructive safety feedback. Don't allow an unsafe act to continue based on assumptions of how they may respond; they might just surprise you. (Example: After the trainee explains what the consequences of standing on the ladder that is placed on the scaffold could be, Butch says, "Do you know that I'm the lead operator in this department? That's why I want to thank you, rookie; I appreciate you speaking up. I'll get off this scaffold and find a taller ladder. You're going to fit in just fine around here.")
- The rookie needed courage to speak to Butch and he recognized and took advantage of a golden opportunity to build confidence in the rookie. Had Butch expressed a severe negative reaction, it is highly doubtful that the rookie would ever speak up again.

EMPLOYEES SHOULD BE WILLING TO GIVE FEEDBACK TO ANYONE

- We don't want feedback to only happen between peers and co-workers. We do want feedback to be given and accepted across the board, maybe with someone you don't know.
- If the value of safety is where it should be, employees should be willing to give feedback to anyone, regardless of position or title.
- There is hardly a greater opportunity for leaders to demonstrate their commitment to safety than by accepting feedback from anyone in the organization. If a leader blows that opportunity, a very powerful and negative message will be sent because they are not willing to accept constructive feedback.

DISAGREEMENT

- There will come a time when we have to agree to disagree about how to solve a problem, or even if there is a safety problem. Honest disagreements can be helpful, but they must be resolved constructively before proceeding and before they escalate into a serious conflict.
- Disagreements can arise when people are frustrated, such as when they are trying to make changes or when equipment is breaking down or running poorly. This may also occur where there's no clear procedure and employees are forced to make decisions about acceptable risks.
- These are defining moments where you can make a huge impact. To make the best decisions and resolve conflicts of risk, you have to stop and get the right people involved to reach agreement before going forward.