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## The Safety Net



### Respect in the Workplace can Increase Safety & Productivity

Leaders across all industries constantly are looking for ways to motivate employees and increase productivity, while simultaneously maintaining or even improving workplace safety. Fortunately, the two goals are not at odds with each other and, in fact, can be synergistic.

While there undoubtedly are many paths forward, I believe that when it comes to both getting the best out of employees and fostering a deep commitment to a mutually safe workplace, it centers on one element: respect.

Since respectful work cultures start at the top, let's first take a look at leadership. One of the most important benefits created by respectful leaders is a solid foundation of trust. Trust leads to the perception of safety, and the feeling of safety helps free organizational potential. Even though we can't control external factors such as the economy, changing technology or competition, trust that our leaders act with intelligence, integrity and in the best interest of their broad-ranging stakeholders fosters a stability that survives most external pressures.

One of the most compelling fields of research supporting the power of respect and trust is neuroscience. Studies conducted around the globe tell us that the old "do as you're told" style of leadership is both outdated and destructive. Leaders who come across as domineering, threatening or intimidating actually diminish employee productivity by triggering the release of cortisol and adrenaline into employees' brains. This toxic cocktail of hormones and neurotransmitters shuts down the prefrontal cortex region of the brain (the part that actually performs work) and literally inhibits their ability to do their best work. It also creates a mental state that is ripe for process mistakes and accidents.

In contrast, when leaders create work environments that consistently value, esteem and nurture their employees, it triggers a collective brain chemistry rich in the neurotransmitters serotonin, oxytocin and dopamine. In addition to enhancing focus, collaboration and resilience, the presence of these compounds correlate with higher levels of employee engagement. This is significant because engaged employees become emotionally committed to the success of their organizations and are much more likely to give their highest levels of discretionary effort when they're performing their work. In the minds of engaged employees, the success (and safety) of the organization overall and their colleagues becomes entwined with their own personal success. This truly is the "holy grail" of organizational effectiveness.

I'll conclude with a final reason for focusing on respect: our individual legacies. Five or 10 years in the future, the people we interact with today aren't going to remember the exact things we said and did. Whether it was during a staff meeting, at a sales conference or on the golf course, the memories will fade. They also aren't going to remember how late we worked, what time we showed up in the morning or our spouse's name. That's not how most human brains work.

While they're not great at details, our brains do a superb job of recording our emotional experiences as we go through life. We remember people from our pasts by how we typically felt when we were in their presence. If we were usually happy around them, we imagine they were smiling and kind to us. If we felt confident and proud, then we remember them guiding and supporting us. If we felt awkward, intimidated or inferior around them, we recreate their demeanor and behavior accordingly. Credit goes to the

brain's limbic system for this unique methodology of remembering people and events.

Hopefully, the people with whom we've worked will remember that we cared about them (whether as leaders or co-workers), always encouraged them to do their best work and contributed to a safe, collaborative culture in which they could participate.

Whether we realize it or not, how we engage others leaves a lasting imprint and literally builds our legacy in their minds, one interaction at a time. Having long since forgotten the details, most people simply will remember how they felt around us and then make up the rest of the story to match. When others think of you and me, will they smile and fondly reminisce or will they quickly "switch channels" and find a happier memory on which to dwell?

How do you want to be remembered? More importantly, what are you willing to do to start responsibly building that legacy today?

*Paul Meshanko is president and CEO, Legacy Business Cultures, and author of The Respect Effect: Using the Science of Neuroleadership to Inspire a More Loyal and Productive Workplace*

### Web Bytes

A number of the most commonly used Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) are located on the EH&S website: <http://www.baylor.edu/ehs/index.php?id=92681>.

If you can't find what you're looking for there and need assistance in constructing an SOP, please contact the chemical hygiene officer at: [Karalyn\\_Humphrey@baylor.edu](mailto:Karalyn_Humphrey@baylor.edu) and she will be happy to assist you.

## Noise Protection Tips

By following these smart noise protection tips from hearing specialists, you can help prevent hearing loss and be happier and healthier in all areas of your life.

**Take everyday noise protection care** – Wearing high-quality industrial earplugs or ear muffs helps protect your ears and your hearing.

**Avoid loud environments** – You don't have to be a musician or jackhammer operator to experience hearing loss on the job. While concerts and construction zones are two environments that regularly cause hearing damage, it can happen in any loud work environment around machinery, large vehicles, etc. Many unions require construction workers to have their hearing tested multiple times each year. While you may or may not need to do this, protecting your ears and avoiding intense volumes will help in noise protection.

**Wear noise-cancelling headphones** – Many workers put on iPods and other music devices to drown out the sound of background noise. Instead of cranking up your favourite tunes to dangerous levels, wear noise-cancelling earplugs. This reduces the overall noise pollution without exposing your ears to additional strain.

**Quit smoking and keep your blood sugar in check** – Smoking doesn't just damage your breathing, lungs and heart. It literally suffocates cells throughout your body, including those inside your ear canal. If you smoke, get your blood sugar levels checked regularly by your doctor to address any imbalances as it can be very damaging for your ears. Do take an expert's advice by visiting a hearing clinic near you.

**Never stick anything inside your ear canal** – It's important to choose a safe noise protection device that doesn't go too far into your ear canal. Similarly, you don't want to be sticking anything in your ears to remove earwax, such as cotton swabs and other stick-like devices. Not only can these sticks and other similar tools damage your hearing by puncturing your ear drum, they also can inadvertently create an uncomfortable build-up by pushing wax and debris further inside your ear canal. If you suspect any hearing damage consult a professional ear specialist and have your ears checked and tested.

**Use noise protection like ear plugs when needed** – If you have hearing loss – or are at risk of it – you should be using noise protection devices like ear plugs at work, on the street and in any other noisy places.

### Did you Know?

NIOSH (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health) recommends that all worker exposures to noise should be controlled below a level equivalent to 85 dBA for eight hours to minimize occupational noise induced hearing loss. NIOSH also recommends a 3 dBA exchange rate so that every increase by 3 dBA doubles the amount of the noise and halves the recommended amount of exposure time.

### Facts and Statistics

- Four million workers go to work each day in damaging noise. Ten million people in the U.S. have a noise-related hearing loss. Twenty-two million workers are exposed to potentially damaging noise each year.
- In 2008, approximately 2 million U.S. workers were exposed to noise levels at work that put them at risk of hearing loss.
- In 2007, approximately 23,000 cases were reported of occupational hearing loss that was great enough to cause hearing impairment. Reported cases of hearing loss accounted for 14% of occupational illness in 2007.
- In 2007, approximately 82% of the cases involving occupational hearing loss were reported among workers in the manufacturing sector.



## On The Lighter Side



## Dear EH&S

Dear EH&S,

I would like to do a classroom demonstration for my students, but not sure if it's allowed. Can you please help me?

-Esteemed Instructor

Dear Esteemed,

Certainly, we would be more than happy to help. We think it's great that you're doing demonstrations in your classrooms. We've seen many types of demonstrations, from biological specimens being brought in to physics demonstra-

tions to chemical reaction demonstrations. It's even possible in some of the large lecture halls in the BSB to set up a portable fume hood.

If you're ever unsure how best to proceed with a class demonstration, feel free to contact us and we will consult with you on how best to carry it out. There may be some instances where we may suggest tweaks for safety's sake, but we fully support demonstrations in the classroom and will do what we can to support you.

## Building the Foundation for a Sustainable Safety Culture, Part 2 by Judy Agnew

There are four cornerstones on which an effective safety culture can be built: leading indicators, accountability, good relationships and discretionary effort. The previous half of this article appeared in the September issue.

### Cornerstone 2: Forward-Looking Accountability

Accountability is essential in all aspects of business, but particularly for safety. Unfortunately, accountability too often is synonymous with blame and negative consequences.

In successful safety cultures, accountability has a different focus. Virginia Sharpe, in her studies of medical errors, has made an important discrimination between what she calls "forward-looking accountability" and "backward-looking accountability." Backward-looking accountability is about assigning blame; finding the individual who made the mistake and delivering punishment. While sometimes this is the right thing to do, there are many downsides to such action, and blaming and punishment seldom results in a safer workplace.

According to Sharpe, forward-looking accountability acknowledges the mistake and any harm it caused but, more importantly, it identifies changes that need to be made, and assigns responsibility for making those changes. The accountability is focused around making changes – building safe habits and a safe physical environment – that will prevent a recurrence, not on punishing those who made the mistake.

Effective safety cultures accept that mistakes are an inevitable part of the workplace, but are relentless

about learning from those mistakes. Forward-looking accountability helps minimize the fear too often associated with the reporting of mistakes and ensures that organizations have the opportunity to learn from them.

### Cornerstone 3: Good Relationships

Relationships matter a lot in safety. Great safety cultures are characterized by good relationships at all levels, which enable open, honest conversations about what is working, what is not, mistakes that have been made and what needs to change. As noted above, mistakes are great opportunities to learn. But workers must trust that if they tell management what really is going on, management won't overreact. This trust most likely is found in the context of good working relationships.

Many leadership behaviors contribute to creating good relationships. Setting clear expectations, providing helpful feedback, acknowledging good work, seeking to understand problems/issues rather than blaming, active listening, following through on commitments, removing roadblocks and asking for feedback on your own effectiveness are some of the ways leaders can build and sustain good relationships.

Having a good relationship doesn't mean being nice all the time or being soft on safety. Good relationships include accountability and constructive feedback. Positive employee-management relationships include mutual trust and respect as a foundation for a partnership around safety.

### Cornerstone 4: Discretionary Effort

Discretionary effort is that extra effort employees can give at work, but don't have to. Discretionary effort is going above the basic requirements. Many people think of safety as a compliance issue – getting people to comply with safety rules, regulations and procedures. However, if you want to go beyond compliance and create a high performance safety culture, discretionary effort is a requirement.

Truly exceptional safety requires that people don't just follow procedures, comply with OSHA standards and wear personal protective equipment (PPE). Exceptional safety happens when people look for and report hazards, give peers feedback on safe and at-risk behavior, volunteer for safety committees, make suggestions for improvement and, most difficult of all, admit when they have made mistakes so lessons can be learned.

Discretionary effort is created through the use of positive reinforcement. Research shows that when people are recognized for what they do well around safety and when reporting problems and concerns is met with reinforcing consequences (such as joint problem solving and problem resolution), employees will be more engaged in safety. In other words, they will give discretionary effort.



## What We're Working On

The EH&S department is in the final stages of hiring additional personnel to focus on general OSHA safety around the campus. One hire will work directly with Student Life on student activities and issues. The other hire will address general OSHA safety on campus and with employees.

The Laboratory Safety Committee will be having an informal "kick off meeting" on October 28th. Look for a summary of this meeting, and all future meetings, to be made available here in The Safety Net.



A Safety Culture Survey was recently concluded and received close to 150 responses. The data will now be analyzed to identify where we are doing well, as well as areas for EH&S to focus their attention. Look for an article on the survey results to appear in a future issue of The Safety Net.

### Current Live Training Schedule:

<http://www.baylor.edu/ehs/index.php?id=98325>

### Training Matrix:

<http://www.baylor.edu/ehs/doc.php/203191.pdf>

Online trainings available through Blackboard

"The Safety Net" is a monthly electronic newsletter published by the Department of Environmental Health & Safety and intended to share information with the Baylor community, promote transparency within the university's safety program, and encourage the continued development of a culture of safety among university employees and students.

Comments, questions, and ideas for future stories are welcomed. Email: [ehs@baylor.edu](mailto:ehs@baylor.edu)