

Communicating Worker Safety: Get to the Heart of the Matter

The significance of workplace safety cannot be overstated, particularly given the substantial number of non-fatal injuries reported each year. Despite improvements over recent decades, the Bureau of Labor and Statistics highlighted almost three million such incidents in 2017 alone. The top industries—healthcare and social assistance, manufacturing, retail, food service and hospitality, transportation and warehousing, and construction—account for the bulk of these incidents. While companies have made strides in improving safety, ongoing challenges remain.

The Balance Between Productivity and Safety

One of the underlying issues may be a subtle but pervasive cultural message that prioritizes productivity over safety. In a society that prizes hard work and where job performance is closely tied to personal identity, employees can feel immense pressure to prioritize output, sometimes at the expense of their well-being.

Consider a real-world example: a young supervisor-level employee working with heavy machinery chose to bypass established safety procedures to unjam a machine quickly. This decision, driven by the pressure to maintain productivity, led to a severe, life-altering injury. Although the worker didn't follow safety protocols, the root cause was not just individual error but a systemic issue—an organizational culture that unintentionally valued speed over safety.

Crafting a Culture of Safety

To address these issues, organizations need to implement a comprehensive, multi-faceted safety plan. This plan should not only include standard safety training but also address the deeper cultural issues that may undervalue safety. A powerful approach involves connecting with employees on a personal and emotional level.

Strategies for Personalizing Safety Communications

1. **Emphasize Family Impact:** Engage employees by asking them to consider the emotional and practical impact of a workplace injury on their loved ones. Illustrate how an injury could affect their family's financial stability, disrupt daily life, and lead to missed significant events like graduations or weddings. By framing safety in terms of its effect on family, you tap into a powerful motivational factor.
2. **Creative Materials:**
 - **Family Safety Activity Sheets:** Develop engaging activity sheets that employees can complete with their families at home. Include puzzles, discussion topics, and fun facts about safety. This not only involves employees but also educates their families about the importance of workplace safety.
 - **Personalized Reminders:** Create picture frame refrigerator magnets with a message like "This is why I work safe." Employees can place a photo of a loved one in the frame, providing a constant visual reminder of why their safety matters.
 - **Poster Campaigns:** Design posters that showcase parents enjoying moments with their children, accompanied by messages like "The best reason to work safe is

waiting for you at home.” This visual connection reinforces the link between safety and family well-being.

- **Children’s Artwork:** Involve employees’ children by inviting them to draw pictures of why they want their parents to work safely. Reproduce these drawings in a calendar or poster format to distribute within the company. This approach makes the message more personal and relatable.
3. **Storytelling:** Share real stories from employees who have been affected by workplace injuries. Highlight the human side of safety incidents and the ripple effect on families. These stories can be powerful in shifting perspectives and reinforcing the importance of adhering to safety procedures.

Conclusion

Creating a culture of safety requires more than just procedural changes; it necessitates a shift in how safety is perceived and valued within the organization. By connecting safety to employees' personal lives and emphasizing its impact on their loved ones, companies can foster a deeper commitment to safe practices. Through emotional appeals and creative communications, organizations can reinforce the critical message that safety is not just a set of rules but a fundamental aspect of a caring and responsible workplace.