Safety is a TEAM SPORT

The Power of a Team

Carl Potter, is a Certified Safety Professional (CSP) who presents his motivational safety message to audiences across the United States. In addition, he is the author of more than a dozen safety books, is the founder of the Safety Institute, and is an Aircraft Commander and Safety Officer for the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary.

The SAFETY Institute

Written by:
**Carl Potter,
CSP, CMC**

www.safetyinstitute.com
carl@safetyinstitute.com
1-800-259-6209

It's a popular notion to promote the concept of team, to build teams, and to teach people to behave as "team players". We see this from sports teams as early as pre-school t-ball and into the high-performing teams of corporate America. In fact, I so believe in the power of teams that I spend my time with clients helping them build teams of people deeply committed to safety in their organizations.

In today's workforce, particularly in high-risk industry where safety is paramount, we have many types of teams – some have been intact a long time, others may be what I call "pop-up" teams – groups of people who are constantly in flux and organized to get unique jobs done. Some teams are high-performing, others not so much. Teams can be cohesive, or not. Good leaders learn to recognize the type of influence their teams have – positive or negative. Let's look at the undesirable weight a team can have on safety. Sometimes teams are "miss-oriented" toward safety. I see this happen when there's a leader (often not the formal leader) who exerts pressure on team members to not conform or adapt. This negatively impacts safety if the influencers are not willing to change to meet new demands of the work environment or unable to adopt new ideas, new rules, or new practices. We hear this when people say "we've done it this way for years and no one got hurt" or when there are outbursts or disrespect in safety meetings. The whole team can be influenced to be unenthusiastic about safety all the way to being destructive in their attitudes, setting the organization up for failure and individuals for injury. On the other hand, a team that is committed to safety can be extremely powerful in the quest for an injury-free workplace.

A team that is unrelenting in its focus on safety is one that looks out for the well-being of its members as well as those outside of the group. It is open to new information, seeks to improve its efficiency and effectiveness, and learns from the experiences of its members. These are some of the characteristics I look for in an elite safety force –teams of individuals dedicated to safety throughout the organization.

When individuals making up a team are dedicated to seeking the same results, they are cohesive and strong. Teams that operate at a high level of professionalism and demonstrate their commitment to workplace values of safety, quality, and production (in that order) are of great value to their organization. Although it is important to have a formal leader of the team whose values reflect these three elements, sustainable success for a positive safety culture requires every team member to operate under these same values.

A team can be one that as a group focuses on the belief that they are only as safe as the top leadership in their company. Additionally, a team can be one which thinks that safety is not their responsibility. Conversely a team can be one that sets expectations for each of its members to act as though safety is their profession. When teams demonstrate that safety is the most important element of their work values, everyone wins.

Consider the following case study of a team that lost their focus:

One client I worked with had four workers watch as a member of their team fall over 200 feet to his death. The team of workers conducted job briefings, everyone knew their job, and all acted professionally except when it came to an important safety element. Following the event each worker admitted telling the young man who fell repeatedly to stay clipped into his anchor point while working aloft. Soon everyone on the team began to believe that the young man had been told enough and that nothing further would change his behavior.

During the interviews, each worker wished they had called a stop to the work and taken the young man off the job. He died at 24 years of age leaving a daughter too young to ever know her daddy. His death was a tragedy that came about because the team was not willing to set standards for themselves. Had they chosen to act as an elite safety team, he *might have continued to live and influenced others to create a positive safety culture.*

Discussion Question: Is the team of people you work contributing to a positive safety culture?

To attain, maintain, and sustain a workplace where it is difficult to get hurt takes committed individuals. Those individuals are what make up teams. Teams such as these should start at the top and flow down through the organization. A sampling of the values and beliefs at any level of the organization should reflect a commitment to safety, quality, and then productivity. When this is the case and the organization is made up of elite safety teams you can bet that there is an extreme probability that nobody gets hurt!

Be Safe! *Carl Potter, CSP*

Safety matters

A website that provides easy navigation, strong search results and powerful business tools!

> Product categories to streamline ordering with fewer clicks.
> Enhanced item detail pages with image galleries.
> Advanced search algorithms to return relevant keyword results.

> Increased management and more options for your Favorites lists.
> New document viewing and reworked account tools.
> More upgrades and tools to come for easy and fast ordering.