

Safety Culture

Safety culture: today this seems to be a valuable buzz word in organizations. There are many definitions of safety culture to choose from, but perhaps the most encompassing definition is this: “the shared values, traditions, customs, philosophy, and policies of an organization; also, the professional atmosphere that grows from this and affects behavior and performance¹. ” To put it simply, it is the accepted practice of how work gets done in an organization: pretty much anything that is tolerated to get the job done.

That toleration has a great degree of affect on the organization and safety. Safety in many organizations is simply not integrated; in fact, it is viewed as a “necessary evil.” When this is the case, safety is only given lip service and a lot of at risk behaviors and physical hazards are tolerated, maybe even expected. As a result, safety performance suffers.

Having the proper safety culture can be the catalyst for better performance elsewhere in the organization. Thomas Krause, PhD, BST (Behavioral Science Technology, Inc.) out of Ojai, CA, wrote of the following elements of a successful business that are present in a good safety culture²:

- Value for Human Life – there is a belief in the preservation and protection of human life that supersedes other goods.
- Integrity – there is commitment to telling the truth and keeping promises, and that results in worker loyalty and commitment.
- Justice – there is a strong sense of fair dealing that establishes trust.
- The Good of the Many – excellence in performance, safety or otherwise, stems from concern for achievement of common good.
- Excellence – is based upon the belief that whatever degree of safety or integrity is achieved, there is always the opportunity to improve.

If you really read these elements, you can see how safety ties into the culture of the organization (what is accepted and what is not) and sets a foundation upon which higher business performance can be achieved.

¹ Source: dictionary.com

² Thomas Krause, Ph.D., *The Ethics of Safety*, Professional Safety, June 1, 2007