



## 4 Barriers to an Effective Company Safety Culture

Developing and enhancing a strong company safety culture can change the landscape of an organization and pay incredible dividends. Without active participation by all members of an organization, a safety culture will not evolve and the safety management system cannot reach its full potential.

If team members resist participating in the safety process, consider addressing common barriers:

### **BARRIER #1: ATTITUDE**

The attitude of an organization, from top to bottom, affects the success of a safety management system. It's important to acknowledge that employees will resist change unless that change is framed with a positive outcome for them as individuals. These are specific attitudinal obstacles and misconceptions to address for both leaders and employees:

- Lack of trust
- A climate of fear
- The uncertainty of constant change
- Treating change like a program instead of a process
- A history not conducive to employee involvement
- Leaders who won't let go
- Employees who focus on their co-workers' imperfections
- Amount of time and effort involved

**Action:** The most important way to address issues with attitude is to become a passionate advocate for safety. Consistently and frequently, show that not only do you model good behavior, but you believe in the safety mission. The resounding message that employees need

to hear is that you are invested in making sure that they are safe on and off the job.

### **BARRIER #2: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Roles must be established, communicated and upheld to have a successful safety management system. It's important to involve individuals in the planning process as well as the execution to ensure buy-in and organization-wide approval. Resistance to your safety system can result from:

- Lack of demonstrated commitment from top leadership
- Lack of responsibility from top management
- Not involving all the key stakeholders
- Not involving the unions
- Resistance from any of the partners (supervisors, managers, support people, unions or labor force)
- Failure to redefine the role of leadership

**Action:** Ensure that you implement a Safety Management System that clearly defines roles and responsibilities. Implement a safety team involving employees from all levels of management and create a mechanism for feedback from employees. Above all, ensure that the management team does not simply "buy-in" to safety, but rather champions the safety effort.



### **BARRIER #3: TRAINING**

When making changes to a system or rolling out a new system, you need ample time to train a core team of experts and then additional time for people to change old habits, ask questions and make adjustments. The success of a safety management system can be challenged by:

- Inadequate training
- Team members being assigned or assuming too much responsibility
- Inadequate time for training to take root, leading to employee frustration and fear of getting it wrong

**Action:** Take the approach that your employees are your front line safety advocates. They need to thoroughly understand what is expected of them and to do this, they need to be adequately trained and retrained. This is done by investing time and money.

### **BARRIER #4: INFRASTRUCTURE**

It's important to build the right environment for a safety management system. It's not something that can happen overnight and will not be adopted homogeneously across an organization. It takes time and constant communication. Systems that fail often encounter these problems:

- Systems and structures not designed to support teams
- Too little or too much structure
- Failure to communicate what's happening
- Not allowing enough time to change
- No transition plan
- Lack of positive attention given to even the smallest improvements
- Failure to educate employees about the importance of reporting incidents and near-miss incidents before someone gets injured
- Lack of management-supported corrective action review and follow-up response

**Action:** Ensure that you implement a Safety Management System that is tailored to your business. At the same time, recognize employees for safety improvements and successes. Once well-designed systems and processes become an integral part of day-to-day activities, they support the business becoming a vibrant, profitable and above all, safe place to work.

**Source:** *A Resource Guide on the Journey to Safety Excellence*, National Safety Council

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