

## SELLING SAFETY

By  
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Recently I was talking to one of my clients and he mentioned to me how hard it is to get employees to follow basic safety policies and rules. He mentioned that they have an area where the noise levels are high, but he couldn't get the employees in this area to wear their hearing protection. As I listened, this reminded me of the same comment I get over and over. No matter where I go I am advised of the same problems. Employees will not wear their safety glasses, they do not drive the forklift safely and they do not practice proper lifting and on and on and on.

This always brings me back to the question of why. After all, getting employees to work safely should be the one of the easiest things in the world for us to do. I can not think of anything more important than an employee's personal safety. Yet employees resist doing what I believe should be a no brainer.

The origin of the WHY starts with our very nature. We are not naturally safe. In fact, we are prone to be risk takers. That is why mankind came to dominate the earth, why business people invest in business, why explorers seek out new places and why employees take chances. Our society rewards risk takers and we reward ourselves every time we successfully take a risk and get away with it. We pat ourselves on the back and each time the risk is approached in the future, it becomes easier and easier to make the decision to take the risk. After awhile, we no longer even perceive it as a risk and do it without thinking.

At work if employees are allowed to develop unsafe work behavior, it becomes extremely difficult to change this behavior once it becomes engrained. That is why I always hear the same thing, I can not get my employees to work safely. They do not fear the consequences and they do not believe they will be injured. After all, we all believe accidents happen to the other guy and we are capable of taking care of ourselves.

Unsafe behavior is often overlooked or even rewarded in an employee if we believe he is a Good Employee. We do not want to get them upset or they may slow down or not work as hard. The problem with this is that the hospitals and grave yards are full of our Good Employees.

If we truly want our employees to work safely, we must sell them on the value and importance of safety. We need to approach this the same way we approach selling a product or service to one of our customers. First, we have to have a good product or service that we believe in. This product or service has to bring value to our customers. We have to stand by our products and services at all times. Also, we have to be able to convince (sell) our customers that our product or service is the best choice for them. Without our customers we would not be able to stay in business.

Although our employees are not customers, they are our most valuable asset. Without them we would not be able to supply the high quality product or service our customers demand. Therefore, the safety of our employees should be treated with the same level of respect that we put into the product or service we deliver. In other words, safety has to have an extremely high value within the company and this has to be communicated on a continuous basis to all of our employees. Our employees have to see the value in safety the same way our customers see the value in the products and/or services we provide. That is the first step in selling safety. Employees will not buy into the Safety Program if they do not see the value placed upon it.

Next, we have to make safety a key point of our management system, right up there with production, sales and quality. Employees are smart and they know where safety ranks, if it does not have a high value they will know it. Next, we have to set high expectations just like quality. Employees have to understand that working safely is not an option, but a requirement of employment.

Management must set the example for the employees to see. Every time a management employee does something unsafe the employees will see. Your actions speak louder than words. Safety starts at the top and that means every management employee from the President on down. After all, would you sell a product or service that you yourself would not use? I don't think so. Like quality standards the safety standards must be enforced everyday. Employees will resist initially, but once they believe in the program and it becomes part of everyday life. Those employees not cooperating need to be counseled and mentored. If for any reason an employee refuses, he/she should be promoted to outside employment more suitable to his/her interests.

Safe behavior should be rewarded instead of unsafe behavior. All of us like to win and be recognized. Set up a system to pat your employees on the back and recognize safe work behavior. This will develop cooperation and encourage other employees to work safer. Advertise the success of your Safety Program. Set up goals for good performance and follow up on these closely. Motivate your employees to achieve these goals.

Last, but certainly not least, provide your employees with the proper tools, equipment, policies and training necessary for them to work safely. These show that safety has value in the organization. Also, these eliminate many of the common excuses I hear as reasons why employees are unsafe.

Sales is certainly the life blood of most businesses. The same technique you use to sell your products or services are the same ones needed to sell the Safety Program. Good customers and good employees, we need them both and they are what makes our business successful. Take care of both equally and you should be in business for a long time.

If you have any questions about safety or would be interested in talking to me about your Safety Program, please feel free to call me at 1-800-356-1274.