



The Safety Dance

BrassCraft Moving Towards a Sustainable Safety Culture

BrassCraft-Thomasville's director of operations, Joe O'Sullivan, faced an interesting challenge: how could he make a plant safety system that was already good, even better?

At O'Sullivan's plant, 160 employees manufacture and distribute machined and assembled brass and copper valves, fittings and risers for the plumbing industry. Historically, the facility had enjoyed low injury rates, but BrassCraft is a company that values continuous improvement in every area of its operations, from compliance to sustainability. Going "above and beyond" is part of the BrassCraft culture, especially where the health and safety of its workforce is at stake.

BrassCraft Challenge

BrassCraft has always taken pride in its low injury incidence rate, but corporate management wanted to take the company's plant safety system from "good" to "great." To do so, they needed to enhance long-term employee buy-in and engagement.

IES Solution

Behavior-based safety training.

Benefits

By introducing an element of fun to the program, management has seen engagement with the program rise.

Lost time accidents, recordable injuries and workman's comp costs have all dropped by more than 50 percent since the program's induction.

Promoting a cultural shift

BrassCraft-Thomasville's corporate leadership in Michigan decided to make the company's safety management systems even more robust, proposing a comprehensive system founded upon five pillars: 1) management commitment; 2) employee involvement; 3) work station analysis; 4) hazard prevention and control; and 5) training.

O'Sullivan volunteered his plant to pilot the initiative. He sought the assistance of the NC State University Industry Expansion Solutions (IES) to help design a behavior-based safety (BBS) program that would focus on the second pillar of the plan, employee involvement. O'Sullivan already knew that BBS encourages active participation from employees and relies on gathering employees' observations about safe and unsafe behaviors and conditions.

By adding the extra dimensions of engagement and fun — two words not commonly associated with workplace safety — he hoped that the program would encourage a cultural shift in the way that employees thought about it, and would foster long-term sustainability.

To that end, O’Sullivan and IES chose core training materials that were unconventional as well as entertaining. One set of materials, for example, featured meerkats – small mongoose-like animals that defend their family groups by taking turns standing sentinel against attacks. The meerkats’ team approach illustrated a primary goal of behavior-based safety: interdependence.

After behavior-based safety training, employee engagement rose and reportable injuries fell. O’Sullivan’s management team used all of the behavior-based safety principles they learned to develop a new “Safe Methods and Conditions Checklist” for the company. The principles are regularly reintroduced and reinforced, and the team consistently collects data to correct underlying causes of unsafe behavior, identify trends and track progress.

Since initial training, the program has taken on a life of its own — safety chants, thematic tokens and dances have become the norm.

O’Sullivan’s hunch that BBS would be a winning approach for his facility turned out to be a sound one. Employees have become proactive about workplace safety and are more

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—Joe O’Sullivan, Director of Operations,
BrassCraft-Thomasville

fully engaged with the entire system, leading to measurable results.

“Lost time accidents, recordable injuries and workman’s comp costs have all dropped by over 50 percent since inception, with the trend improving further still,” says O’Sullivan. “Moreover, due largely to the help of IES, employees report that they are much more personally engaged in interdependent safety fundamentals and principles, both on and off the job.”

With a subject as serious as safety, introducing an element of fun might seem like an unconventional approach. BrassCraft’s continuing success proves that innovation often leads to exceeded expectations.



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