

Case Study #1

CULTURE CHANGE IMPROVED WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY

THE CHALLENGE

Our challenge was to transform the safety culture of the organisation to improve workplace health and safety. We had a high level of lost time injuries, a lack of personal responsibility for health and safety amongst the workers, and supervisors were not demonstrating good safety behaviours. It was also evident that our manual handling roles were strenuous to perform, staff turnover was high, and the company culture was low.

OUR APPROACH/THE SOLUTION

UNDERSTANDING THE LANDSCAPE – LEADING FROM THE TOP

As the new CEO, connection with employees was essential. Being visible and curious, asking questions, and listening was critical to understanding work as done versus work as imagined. I spoke to everyone over four weeks, ensuring I covered all shifts.

WORKER CONVERSATION INSIGHTS IDENTIFIED:

- Minimal health and safety training
- Health and Safety concerns were raised but not actioned by supervisors or managers
- Leaders not visible on the shop floor
- Health and safety viewed as the Health and Safety Manager's role
- A high number of manual handling injuries

Understanding leadership's view and experience of health and safety in the business was also paramount.

KEY DISCUSSION TOPICS INCLUDED:

- Leadership's attitudes and actions in health and safety
- Health and Safety as a priority
- What forums did the business have for discussing issues, making improvements?
- How good was the business in following up on concerns?
- Did the leaders of the business look at Health as well as safety?

Safety culture is a subset of the company culture, so to change the safety culture, it was essential to understand the overall culture.

LEADING THE CULTURE AND EMPOWERING PEOPLE

Sharing my observations and insights was essential before sharing my vision for the business. Everyone needed to understand the 'why' before they could come on the change journey. The 'why' cared about employees and ensured they went home to their families in at least the same condition as they left home that morning.

As a leadership team, we talked about where we wanted to be in the future and what we would prioritise. We identified some quick wins to demonstrate to the workers that we were listening and taking action. It was crucial in building trust and encouraged people to keep providing feedback and ideas.

TRAINING AND RESOURCE INVESTMENT

We ensured workers visited a physiotherapist when early 'niggles' appeared rather than waiting for an injury to occur. We participated in a mental health week and encouraged workers to get involved in a related activity. We invested in training, including mental health first-aid certification, an external resource to assess chemicals and manual handling and appointed a Health and Safety Advisor. These investments demonstrated we were serious about health and safety.

COMMUNICATE

You cannot communicate too much! It is essential. We used a combination of CEO weekly updates, monthly hui, leaders demonstrating their safety leadership by engaging with their teams and health and safety reps engaging with workers.

RECOGNISE WHAT YOU WANT TO SEE

We had an employee of the month and encouraged people to nominate people for demonstrating good health and safety behaviours. Supervisors and management included safety behaviour observation opportunities during the day to acknowledge and build connections.

EMPOWER PEOPLE TO BE ABLE TO MAKE AN IMPACT

Attracting more health and safety reps was key to people wanting to be involved in health and safety. We view health and safety reps as a safety leadership role which created development opportunities for those reps who wanted to continue a career in health and safety.

LESSONS LEARNED

Investing the time upfront, connecting with everyone by being visible, curious, asking questions, and listening was paramount in our ability to understand everyone's issues, interests, and ideas.

Learning about the different perspective's employees have about their health and safety responsibilities and their understanding of our critical risks, including stress and mental health, was crucial to managing inductions, education, and training.

Having a better appreciation for different workgroup environments and risks, I would have a separate office, sales and factory health and safety meeting to address concerns by workgroups more efficiently.

A regular review of the changes we were implementing provided feedback on what was working and what was not. Communication and being connected with the workers were key to getting constant feedback.

THE IMPACT

What did this all achieve? Accidents stayed stubbornly high for a while, but the seriousness of the accidents and the number of areas that had high-risk potential dropped. Worker and leader engagement grew, and the number of health and safety reps increased due to employees understanding their health and safety responsibilities. We carried out a survey, and over 95% of people believed we cared about their health, safety and wellbeing, and things were moving in the right direction. The safety culture transformation, in turn, changed the company culture through better communication, training, recognition and empowerment.

WHAT'S NEXT

Everyone is committed to continuing our health, safety and wellbeing culture journey and the transformation created disciples across the organisation. It has not relied on the leadership team to make it sustainable. The health, safety and wellbeing journey are everyone's responsibility.