

The Human Side of Safety



Our mission is to improve the safety and success of people and the places where they work.

Getting Employees to Speak Up

The damages from a “stay silent” company culture are many and costly. Knowing what employees see, think, and believe is essential for preventing (and catching) mistakes to avert costly rework and safety disasters. Smart business executives desire open communication, but many are unaware that their culture may not actually support it.

When employees won’t speak up for safety, they won’t speak up to address other important issues. Quality and productivity suffer right along with safety. This happens because employees fear they might be:

Ignored – Nobody cares, no change, no point

Ridiculed – Messengers get teased, taunted

Fired – Outspoken means “noncompliant”

Some organizations administer long surveys to find out whether employees feel free to speak up for safety. But when an appropriate process is used, just a few short questions can generate a valid assessment of whether a problem exists and to what extent.

If a problem exists, implementing a new communication policy won’t fix it. When enough employees are afraid to speak up, it’s a problem with the company culture. As the saying goes, culture trumps policy.

Working to change company culture requires a strategy and coordinated actions that are demonstrated by the leadership and everyone down the line. This requires consistency of behavior over time.

Meanwhile, helping employees to improve their communication skills is invaluable. When they do begin to speak up for safety (and other issues), messages that are delivered with clarity and respect are more likely to be heard. It is equally important that supervisors receive training to improve their empathic listening skills. Paying attention and responding builds employee morale,

**LISTEN UP AND
PAY ATTENTION**

Employees are more likely to speak up when they believe supervisors and managers will listen, respond with understanding, and take action.