
THREE PROCESSES FOR LASTING AND POSITIVE CHANGES

In Employee Safety Performance

By DAVID SARKUS, MS, CSP

Joe and Willie learn what fuels positive change

“Willie, I want to introduce you to Chuck Smith. Chuck’s going to be helping us with improving our safety leadership and coaching process — the training portion. We’ve been looking for something new that fits our culture — we need a jump-start and more positive kinds of changes.” Willie had been resisting getting more involved in safety, and Joe thought this might be a good time to introduce him to some new thoughts.

“Alright Chuck, you know all about me, don’t you? I’ll tell you right now — I can’t be a safety coach!” Willie was already defensive. Chuck realized he had an opportunity to break down some walls with Willie and thought this might be a good time to speak up.

Walls of Resistance

“As a consultant and trainer, I get to work with some really great companies that are getting to an exceptional state of safety performance, even zero-recordable injuries,” said Chuck. “Some have been doing it for five or six years and even more. But two things are necessary, beyond the support you already have at the top. First, we need more involvement — more engagement from supervisors, front-line leaders, and with workers like you. Two, we need to make the most of everyone’s coaching skills. It’ll take some time but we can get there.”

Willie smiled and shook his head cautiously and then looked at Joe. “Hey Joe, please — no more. I don’t want to be an observer or a safety coach or safety leader of any kind!”

Joe smiled. “Let’s listen to Chuck. He has some great stuff to share with us over the next few weeks.”

“Thanks Joe.” Chuck was ready to keep talking about the direction that was necessary to move to a higher level of safety performance. He wanted to discuss

three keys — three kinds of positive changes: magnitude of change, flexibility of change, and durability of change.

Magnitude of Change



“We need more involvement and feedback so we can get different kinds of positive changes,” said Chuck. “Some of your own group’s performance has drifted a bit and we can’t get complacent. In terms of psychology, we need to think about magnitude of change. A fancy term that means we can move from one level, to a much higher

level of safe performance and work, very quickly and efficiently — even across groups.”

“Yeah, Joe would like that — up another notch without a lot of work,” said Willie. Willie was trying to be funny to deflect some of the early tension. Chuck had a lot more to say but didn’t want to give the guys too much, too soon.

“I can’t possibly tell you guys everything we want to do because I’ll have your heads spinning. And if I feed you too much you’ll bring it back up. I’m sure you know what I mean,” Chuck smiled.

“There are a number of ways to get greater magnitude of change,” he continued. “One is to reinforce specific actions, on the spot. Even use very small token rewards, at times — especially if it fits your culture. But the rewards have to be really small, like a token for some soda. We also need to get more people to set the goals that we want to achieve. And we can even use some goal-setting.”

Joe wasn’t saying much at all, but as a supervisor, he had first-hand experience regarding how well a more positive approach would work.

Flexibility of Change

“The second kind of positive change is what we call

flexibility of change,” said Chuck. “It’s when people start working safer at work and at home in ways we didn’t think about. People start working safely in ways we didn’t begin to identify or target in any kind of way. To do this we need to get more people involved as safety coaches — workers and supervisors in some cases. The feedback we give has to be specific and targeted for the tasks. It has to help make safety expectations crystal clear. Also, I often like to talk about the 3Fs — good feedback needs to be Fast, Frequent, and as Favorable and Genuine as possible.”

Durable Change

“No more big words — and that’s 3Fs and a G!” Willie, always the joker, was getting curiously drawn into Chuck’s discussion.

“I just have one big word left Willie — it’s durability of change. You see, when we help everyone build their credibility, become better coaches, and better at giving persuasive feedback, everybody starts to realize that they need to work more safely for themselves, their co-workers, and their families. Not so much for this company — but for themselves and their loved ones! You and everyone else will become safety leaders and will want to work safely even when nobody’s around. Even when you’re tempted to take a short-cut! That means 24/7 — at work and at home.”

“We know what you mean,” Joe spoke up. “Some of our workers don’t think we supervisors and front-line leaders do enough safety coaching. That’s probably true and it should be a normal part of our jobs.”

Willie chimed in: “I agree, Joe. Hey Chuck — I’m looking forward to hearing more but right now I gotta go.

Joe looked at Chuck as Willie took off. “I think Willie’s interested and he can become a champion for safety too!”

THREE TYPES OF CHANGE

MAGNITUDE OF CHANGE

means we can move from one level to a much higher level, very quickly and efficiently. There are a number of ways to get greater magnitude of change.

FLEXIBILITY OF CHANGE

occurs when people start working safer at work and at home in ways we didn’t think about or target.

DURABILITY OF CHANGE

occurs when employees help each other become better coaches, storytellers, and better at giving persuasive feedback. Everyone starts to realize that they need to work more safely for themselves, their co-workers, and their families.

Note: This article is based on a true story but the names have been changed to protect the innocent.



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