

Seven Principles Of Social Influence

David Sarkus
May 30, 2000

How to express care and concern.

If management is committed to safety, it must have a visible process to express its support. How do you express care and concern while influencing behavior in a positive way? What kind of tactical approach can be used?

One way to start is for safety professionals to help others make use of principles like the "Seven Cs of Social Influence in Safety Management" (Sarkus 1995). These principles shadow behavioral approaches as a proven way to influence behavior. They encompass: caring, coaching, correcting, confirming, collaborating, clarifying, and conciliating.

Caring: A few ways to show care and concern include: sending cards and making hospital visits to injured employees; greeting workers by their first name and with a handshake; being available to listen to personal problems; opening closed workers' compensation cases to seek the best available medical treatment for employees; or coworkers consistently obtaining and offering personal protective equipment to visitors and other coworkers. Caring can be contagious; it develops trust and is the foundation for the remainder of the Seven Cs.

Coaching: If people are taught to care, coaching will follow. Coaching involves demonstration and repetition- "show and tell." Coaching also means that facilitating team skills is done through a trial-and-error process. With coaching, a door is always left open for questioning and feedback. Support is given so that workers are always learning directly and by observation. Workers also realize that it is acceptable and desirable to coach each other. This creates a "collective identification" with safety.

Correcting: We must stop at-risk behavior so it does not continue. If people are not corrected, at-risk behaviors will be recognized as acceptable, and undesirable actions will persist. As an example, if employees work on an elevated platform without appropriate fall protection and have never experienced injuries or close calls, their behavior will likely continue unless undesirable consequences follow, or they are corrected. If employees realize that supervisors and peers will look away, unwritten rules are established and at-risk behavior will continue.

Confirming: If workers are regularly corrected, they must also repeatedly hear words of praise when they are observed working safely. As authors Mantz and Simms have said, we need to be "hero-makers." This is especially true for managers, supervisors, and peers.

Collaborating: When people are steadily involved with safety efforts, there is a greater sense of ownership, productivity, and pride, particularly when success is realized. Therefore, workers must be given knowledge so they can be empowered as a group. This may include representative involvement with design reviews and testing, ergonomic improvements, training, goal-setting and feedback, or hazard identification and abatement. And by making proactive "system improvements" within the physical environment, individuals are more likely to work safely.

Clarifying: Goals and objectives need to be regularly and clearly communicated so that groups of employees are more apt to move toward what they have "bought into." Additionally, by clarifying individual values, workers can better align their own behavior with what is really important to them.

Part of this process can involve persuasion techniques and intentions or "self-talk." Workers can sometimes talk themselves "into" or "out of" working safely. How often have you talked yourself out of wearing your seat belt? A survey at my facility showed that over 70 percent of the time, one group of employees had sound thoughts about how to safely perform their work before starting the job.

Conciliating: Strained working relationships cause an unhealthy downward spiral, which leads to a decline in morale, productivity, and safety performance. Whenever possible, every leader and safety professional should work toward helping others reconcile differences. Unresolved conflict is distracting and stops necessary communications, draining individuals and organizations of energy. Conflicts must be identified, and agreements met, to establish direction toward a common goal-employee safety.

One reminder: These principles need to be continually emphasized so that in time, they become an ingrained practice - a part of the safety culture.