

The strongest motivation

*by David Sarkus
November 1, 2006*

Leadership from the heart

"Joe, got a minute?"

"Sure, what do you need, Willie?"

"I really don't want to fill out this safety card."

"Let me see what you got," replied Joe.

"Ah, this is the new scorecard, our 'Champions for Safety.' You should fill it out, Willie. I heard some people talking about what a good safety leader you're becoming. You'll probably get some points."

Willie shot back: "I hope nobody puts my name on one of these things — I don't want any points!"

"This is important stuff, Willie. Everyone needs to step up and be a better safety leader, you know, to care for each other. Supervisors like me can't be around all of the time."

"I know, Joe, but some of us don't want to step up. And some of us don't want to be recognized in front of everybody."

Four essentials

Hmmm... Joe thought for a moment. "Willie, you know, supervisors get feedback from you guys every quarter. We call it upward feedback. The scorecards help us to align our actions with our vision for zero incidents."

"Yeah, I know. But where are you going with this?"

"Well, it's not good enough just to have managers and supervisors involved in much of this safety process. All of us need to align our actions with the vision. That's why you and your peers are going to start receiving feedback from us — and from your co-workers. This scorecard is a really good form of measurement."

"Alright, Joe." Willie was hesitant but Joe had the floor.

"Our experience, and some other good studies, show us that the best leaders, the ones who have the most productive and safest workers, are also the ones who show genuine care and concern. When people like you and I lead from the heart..."

"How long do you need, Joe? I gotta get back to work in ten minutes."

"I only need five, OK?"

"Go ahead," replied Willie.

"There are four parts to this kind of 'heartfelt leadership.' First, effective leaders or coaches know

how to listen. Listening says that you care about what others have to say. But listening also has to lead to actions at times. Actions like following up on a work order, eliminating a hazard. Get the idea, Willie?’

“I hear you, Joe, I’m listening.”

“OK, the second part is the use of praise. But only when it’s genuine. From the heart. We all need positive feedback to help us work more safely so it becomes a natural part of our daily routines. I always try to use the ‘three Fs.’ Make your feedback fast, on the spot, right away; frequent, give it as often as possible; and make it as favorable as possible. But again, be genuine.”

“Yeah, that’s you, Joe.”

“The third part involves leading by example. From fall protection up high, to housekeeping issues down low, people read our actions all the time.”

“I know, I heard you say it before, Joe. ‘Our actions may be the only safety procedures someone may ever read’.”

“That’s right, Willie. I’m glad you’ve been paying attention. Here’s the last part, involvement.”

“Yeah, collaboration, as you say, Joe.”

“Right, the more ways you and your peers get involved in safety, the better off for all of us. Collaborating within teams for hazard assessments, peer observations, and accident investigations are just a couple of ways.

“Now about your scorecard, Willie. It helps measure what I just talked about — those four keys. I know you and your buddy, Nelson, can step it up a bit more. And whoever’s recognized as a champion won’t be embarrassed in front of everyone. We’ll also be sending some really nice kinds of recognition home to people’s families. It helps reinforce what we’re trying to do, and helps kids recognize the importance of safety.”

Foundation of leadership

“But what about you supervisors?” asked Willie. “How can you lead with a big heart and make tough decisions?”

“Sometimes I have to direct, sometimes I coach, and sometimes I empower you guys,” said Joe.

“You know we’ve even had to let some people go. Our leadership techniques have to match an individual’s needs. But the foundation of our influence is strongest when we really care. It’s about learning and practicing a new kind of CPR.”

“Cardio-pulmonary resuscitation?”

“No. We need to practice caring leadership, professionalism in all we do, and we have to show respect for every individual. This is how we breathe new life into our safety culture.”

"I like that, Joe — a new CPR for a zero-incident safety culture."

"You got it. Now get back to work and be a champion for safety!"

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