



Supervisors' Safety Update

Ideas and Strategies for Leaders



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TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND SAFETY

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Errors are costly. Each time a mistake is made, an organization's profit potential is lessened. Too many errors can eliminate *all* profit, or cause the loss of your customers. But errors need not occur. Through the process known as Total Quality Management (TQM), troublesome mistakes can be reduced or eliminated. While TQM has primarily been directed toward improving production quality, the techniques of the system can also improve safety performance. For example, a thorough investigation of an accident will show that the root cause, in most cases, is an error or omission somewhere in the chain of events. The goal of TQM is to identify and correct these deficiencies before an error--in either quality or safety--occurs. Preventing problems early on is much easier and cheaper than correcting problems later.

What is TQM?

Briefly stated, TQM relies on "error proofing," a process designed to make human error improbable or impossible. This process is the blending of people, material, methods, equipment and environment during the creation of a product or completion of a work task. TQM is a program that requires worker participation. To succeed, everyone's input and participation is a major and vital component of the program.

Change is Necessary

TQM involves change, with the goal of improving quality or safety performance. Change, however, often meets resistance. The question is, "If we continue to do things as we always have, what will be the outcome?" The answer, of course, will be, "The same!" To make progress, something must change for the better.

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a value,
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People are Important

Many supervisors feel their job is just to manage people. This idea needs revision. The people working for you are but one element of a process. Successful supervisors do not manage *only* people, or *only* the task, they manage the entire process. A common misperception in both production and safety is that there would *be* no problems if workers would simply do their jobs as they were taught. However, if you study TQM, you will learn the "85-15 Rule" which states that 85% of problems are within the system, while only 15% lie with the worker. Employees do not take risks intentionally; they simply try to do the best they can with the tools they are given. The reality is, workers are often hampered by the system--and the system is the responsibility of management. As part of the management team, if you are not willing to accept this premise, you have set yourself up for failure.

Basic Principles of TQM

A full discussion of TQM concepts is not possible in this brief paper. However, let's review several key principles:



1. **Worker participation is a must.** There are several reasons for this. No matter how well you study and design a process, the “rubber meets the road” at the production worker’s level. When production problems exist, employees on the shop floor are the first to know. TQM relies heavily on the concept of employee empowerment and teamwork to solve these problems. This is important. People who feel they are part of a unified, sharing group are more likely to care, not only for themselves and their own work group, but for others outside the work group as well.

People are most accepting of change when they are invited to help guide or initiate the change. Workers who become involved in the decision-making process *want* their ideas to succeed. With everyone working for success, success will more likely be realized. On the other hand, if changes are dictated by management without employee input, what happens? Usually suspicion, resentment, and a slowdown in making change take over. Even if the change is in the employee’s best interest, opposition occurs. Instead of management and employees in partnership, they become adversaries.

2. **Study and planning is a must.** Errors, whether they pertain to safety *or* quality, are predictable. From experience, we can identify procedures that may cause injury. A thorough analysis of a new process will identify potential problems that should be addressed. A standard Job Safety Analysis is valuable for accomplishing this but fulfills only a portion of the TQM analysis. We are seeking total quality and safety as an unbroken unit. Each step of the process must be scrutinized to determine what problems are presented in each step and what can be done to make each step less hazardous.

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3. **Goals must not be the sole focus.** TQM can be a very scientific process, relying greatly on research and statistics. For example, incident rates are often used to measure safety performance and future safety goals. It is desirable to have such goals but these should not be the major focus. When you achieve a goal, it’s critical to understand *how* you got there, enabling you to *repeat* the process. So, the focus should be on the steps that must be taken to achieve the goal. Think of it this way: focusing on the outcome rather than the process is like trying to play golf, tennis or baseball by watching the scoreboard and not the ball. When you keep your eye on the moving ball, you are studying the process!
4. **The culture of the organization should drive the safety process.** This involves perception. If we are simply striving to avoid OSHA citations, the safety effort may be viewed by employees as a payoff for someone else--the boss--not themselves. We want employees to feel that their efforts have rewarded *them* with an injury-free workplace. People would rather strive to achieve success than to avoid failure. So how do we get people more fully involved? First, try to decrease the number of “top down” directives and “quick fix” programs--ask line employees to help solve the problems. Second, increase team building discussions, group goal-setting and opportunities for feedback. Then, celebrate when process or outcome goals are achieved. Folks tend to repeat behavior that is rewarded!
5. **Make safety a value, rather than a priority.** When asked if safety should be a priority, many people will say “yes.” Yet most agree that safety should ideally become a value rather than a priority. Why? Priorities often change depending upon the situation; values remain constant--as deep-seated personal beliefs which are never compromised. When safety becomes a key value on a company-wide level, a “safety culture” has been established.

Your Challenges

Implementing a safety initiative within a company is no different than implementing a quality initiative. Both attempt to change human attitudes and behavior. People change behavior patterns only because they want to--because they see reward in it. It is your job to find ways to accomplish this through employee participation and teamwork. You must personally be open to change too, as a model for those you supervise. Within the TQM movement, it is said, "Success comes not from inspections, but from improvement of the production process." This means you must constantly evaluate and redesign production processes--both the work environment (machines, equipment, and tools) and work methods. This is a formidable challenge. Yet, meeting this challenge will improve safety, quality, and chances for survival in this increasingly competitive world.



Errors are costly. Accident prevention is achieved by doing things right the first time--every time. When this happens, you'll have not only a safe operation but an efficient, productive, cost efficient operation as well. Success relies neither on luck nor just past experience. It relies on Total Quality Management.