



Behavioral Based Safety Management Program

Safety and Environmental Management System

SEMS 2-12

BEHAVIORAL SAFETY

Realizing that culture plays an important part in most companies' activities, managers are concerned about finding ways of changing the "safety culture" for the better. That's why we see various safety programs aimed at changing employee attitudes with promotions, slogans, lotteries, and the like. Each of these approaches has its place, of course, but it is important to see the appeal of these approaches rests on the unexamined assumption that the only way to change the company's culture is to change the attitudes of its employees.

Certainly attitude change in employees will have impact on culture; however, it is very difficult to change attitudes using the "traditional methods". The behaviorally based approach is one that improves culture by identifying and then managing a change in behaviors, which are critical to safety. There are two powerful reasons to focus on behaviors first:

1. Behavior can be measured, whereas attitude presents measurement problems, and
2. A change in behavior leads to a change in attitude.

Our attitudes are very important to us. They represent our beliefs, values, feelings, and perceptions; and as such they serve to guide our behavior. The problem with trying to manage change by focusing on attitudes is that attitudes are internal events, and are extremely difficult to measure. The behavior-based approach focuses strictly on observable, measurable actions that are crucial to safety. It's a craft orientated approach that treats safety-related behaviors as critical work related skills. It is measurable because it is something that occurs outside the individual.

The old belief (or the attitude-based approach) focuses on things that occur within the individual. It focuses on areas such as awareness, commitment, attention, and personal responsibility. Although this heightens awareness, attention and commitment level is supposed to occur through training and past experience, which should then produce a more positive safety attitude. When the old attitude based approach discusses behavior, it refers to how they wish people felt and acted which is why so much time is spent addressing an individual's attitude. This as we've learned over the years has little or no long-term affect on accident prevention. What we need to learn is how to separate the two. The old attitude based approach creates misguided beliefs that waste time and resources on raising individual safety consciousness. This approach is out dated and counter-productive.



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Let's consider the follow scenario. There are 2 companies. One use the old attitude based program while the other uses the behavioral based process. A Potential client asks each company to report on results from their program. The old attitude based manager says "Boy the supervisors have really been pushing safety. Our crew's attitude and commitment really seems to have improved. I think were really starting to make believers out of them."

In contrast the behavioral based company manager says "Employees have developed an inventory of critical behaviors and have trained observers for each crew. A base line of 85% safe behavior has been established. Over the past 3 months all crews are up to at least 89% safe from the original 73%. We have found, however, that % safe behavior in the areas of personal protective equipment and body position remain below the base line rating. Our crews have been working together and are currently developing action plans to address these areas."

Can we see the difference? One focuses on employee attitude or feelings and the other on measurable performance based criteria. When performance of safety related behavior so does employee attitude.

When it comes to safety, behavioral performance is the true bottom line. The behavioral based approach does not concern itself with attitude because attitude follows performance. When a work group demonstrates progress as measured by its peers, safety attitude also improves.

You can make someone feel responsible for their safety but not actually improve his or her safety performance. Attitude based safety focuses on the feeling side while behavior based safety focuses on the performance side. It is a performance expectation not a feel good thing.

The behaviorally based approach to accident prevention builds on workforce involvement. When this process is properly administrated, the crews become interested in their safety performance.