

Public Sector Tract: Moving your Agency to a “Culture of Safety”

Kansas Safety & Health Conference

Manhattan, KS

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Moving your Agency to a “Culture of Safety”

The Story of Building a Culture of
Safety Within My Former County
Agency

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Presentation Outline

- My Background
- My Purpose Today
- Intended Primary Takeaways
- My Former Agency's Story
- Resources Available
- Questions & Answers

My Background

- Currently the Local Road Engineer for the Kansas Association of Counties – Since December 2024
 - Learn and Share Experiences, Knowledge and Information with County Highway Departments in Kansas
 - Mostly related to Roads, Bridges and Department Management
- Former Career - 32 Years as Director of Public Works & County Engineer
 - Managed a large department with multiple divisions.
 - Helped Develop and Administer Policies and Programs of the Board of County Commissioners.



My Background

- Engineer by Education, Practice and License.
- Manager by Practice and Experience.
- I have experienced a lot and have tried to learn from those experiences. Even then, I have a lot to learn and want to always continue learning.
- I have always had a passion for helping others grow in knowledge and experience and ultimately in success.
- Never wanted to be in a position to explain to someone's family that their loved one was in an accident at work and didn't survive.

My Purpose Today

- Sharing one of the important experiences in my former career: Being an integral part of a very necessary shift in workplace culture – Developing a Culture of Safety.
- Not intended to be highly technical program.
- Will be more about sharing this story and the commitments required from my agency, myself and all my counterparts in the agency to ultimately successfully build a Culture of Safety.

Intended Primary Takeaways

- Moving from a passive safety culture to a truly active safety culture requires active involvement and support across the entire organization.
- Let every incident be a "learning opportunity", not just for you, but, for your organization.
- Don't reinvent the wheel. As a public entity you already have great resources available for access.

The Story - Building a Culture of Safety

- Where We Were
- The Break-Through
- Building the Safety Program
- Key Factors for Success
- Challenges
- A Work in Progress
- Program Results

Where We Were

- Very Basic Program-Lacked Active Engagement
- Reactive Tendency Rather Than Pro-active Tendency
- Inconsistent Enforcement
- Understood Need for a Strong Comprehensive Safety Program
- But,
 - The Passion and Priority Was Not Shared
 - Overwhelming Task without sufficient staff and technical resources

The Break-Through

- A Major Incident following a Series of Similar Incidents that Could have had a Tragic Outcome
- Requested Permission from Administration to have Outside Review – We Learned A Lot
- County's Experience Modification Factor for Workers Compensation Insurance hit 1.10. Premiums putting a hard hit on an already stressed County Budget

The Break-Through

- Recognition From Administration and County Commission –
Need To Support Building a Strong County-wide Safety Program
- Public Works Capitalized on the Opportunity
 - Became the Mark in Time to Needed Change

Building Butler County's Safety Program

- 2 Most Important Steps
 - Got the Attention and Support of Administration
 - Brought our Insurance Agent on Board as a Resource
- Breaking Thru to Department Employees
 - Safety Has to be Primary in Every Task, Every Decision and Every Action – Safety Has to Be Part of the Culture
 - Safety Can No Longer Be Passive
 - Building an expectation that each employee is responsible to themselves, to their co-workers and to their families to assure that everyone returns home safely at the end of the day.

Building Butler County's Safety Program

- Employees Were Challenged To Consider
 - Put yourself in the role of explaining a tragedy to a fellow employee's family?
 - Ask yourself if you did everything possible to prevent a tragedy?
 - What are the Natural Consequences of Silence or Inaction? Could you live with that?
- Employees, Co-workers, Crew Leaders and Supervisors have Equal Accountability – Consequences for Actions and In-Actions

Building Butler County's Safety Program

- Employees Given Opportunity to Participate in Development of Key Parts of Program – Ownership
 - PPE Program Development
 - Work Task Safety Evaluation
 - Help Develop Safety Countermeasures

Building Butler County's Safety Program

- Administration Providing Needed Tools to Help Assure Success
 - Insurance Agent as Partner on the ground
 - Access to relevant training tools
 - Administration Department Actively Involved
 - Development of County Policies for Entire County Organization
 - Progressive Discipline Program
 - Performance Evaluation Tied to Safety
 - Development of Forms

Key Factors for Success

- Absolutely Have to Be Open-Minded and Accept Critical Perspective
- Treat All Incidents as Preventable-No place for Defensive Posturing
- Every Incident is an Opportunity to Learn
- Don't settle on an initial conclusion. Follow-up, investigate, ask questions.

Key Factors for Success

- Crew Leaders and Co-Workers held responsible for failure to intervene
- Engage employees-Share Ownership
- “Safety First” – Not just a catch phrase. No crew should start a task without safety requirements being the first item to be evaluated
- Pay Attention – You may have the wrong employee assigned to a task

Key Factors for Success

- Train and Reinforce with a Purpose and Passion
- GIVE RECOGNITION - SUCCESS BELONGS TO EVERY EMPLOYEE

Challenges

- Breaking the CYA Factor
 - Not my fault/Non-Preventable Incident
 - I'm not responsible for the actions of my co-worker
- Reviewing and Following Up on All Incidents
- Getting Employees to Report Near-Misses
- A Very Comprehensive Program Needs a Dedicated Full Time Person

A Work In Progress

- Detailed Job Specific PPE Requirements
 - Provide Training on PPE Use and Care
 - Needs to be on-going as we learn more, or take on new tasks or identify changes in safety standards
- Develop/Modify Work Area Assessment Checklists to be adaptable to Job-site Application
- Designated County Employee Conducting Random Work Area Inspections

A Work In Progress

- Continue to Train and Re-Train on Relevant Safety Topics
- Develop Equipment Safety Training Guides
- Develop Equipment Operator Training
- Adjust County Safety Committee Structure to rotate staff level employees

Public Works Safety Results

- Increased awareness
- Regular Training
- Better Communication
- Accident Analysis
- Consistent Discipline

Agency Wide Safety Results

- Consistency Among Departments
- Improved Reporting and Follow Up

Agency Wide Safety Results

- Happy/Healthy Employees
- Much Improved Safety Culture
- Experience Modification Factor went from 1.10 to 0.70 over a 3-year period – Savings of over \$100,000 per year
- Achieving the most important goal - To Send Everyone Home Safe!!

Resources

- Workers Compensation/Liability Insurance Agency – Risk Management Division
 - Required under state law to provide trained professionals and resources on safety related to the type of customer exposures.
- Kansas Department of Labor – Safety Training Division
 - Provide safety training on a wide range of general topics to agencies and businesses.
- Risk Management/Safety Consultants
- Subscription to On-line Safety Management/Training Tools

Thank You

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Feedback Survey



Your feedback is important to me!