

What Safety Recognition Means

Over the course of my career, I made it my practice to always recognize people for their efforts. In particular, during the last ten years of my career where I had increasing responsibility as a supervisor and manager, it became readily apparent to me that a company's Culture of Safety can improve its safety success through this key success factor. You must acknowledge people for working safe and for their buy-in to company policies and procedures where safety needs to always be first. Attitude is so huge in this regard.

Here are a couple of real life examples. Six months before I retired I was doing a safety walk on a project that involved many people doing elevated work. I was on an elevated walkway that went around large pontoons that were being built for the new SR 520 highway bridge in Seattle, WA. At the time there were 120 Ironworkers alone on the job. I saw an Ironworker who was a subcontractor employee (a safety subject I will discuss in another blog) tied off on wall rebar 20' off the "deck". He didn't know I was there. I watched him for a full five minutes tie rebar, maintain 100% tie off, and move around, always doing the right thing. Finally I yelled to him and said, "Thanks for doing the right thing and keeping yourself tied off." He got a grin on his face, waved and went back to work. That simple acknowledgement, I feel, will reinforce that worker's actions to continue to do the right thing, even when no one is looking.

About a month later on the above described project I was working my way through a pontoon under construction on another safety walk when I heard yelling but could not see or hear exactly what was going on as I was three bays (compartments) away from the incident. I proceeded to go straight to this location where I asked the Ironworker Foreman, "What just happened?" "You don't even want to know," replied the foreman. I said, "Yeah, I really do." The foreman said, "I caught one of my guys not wearing his safety glasses and I chewed his a__." Actually the four-letter words were flying and he strongly made his point, which included a verbal warning that the worker would be sent home for a day without pay if caught doing that again. I thanked him for correcting both an unsafe act and condition. Further I did what we called an "On-the-Spot" safety recognition and provided him with a special tee-shirt that I'd had made for the project. This helps to reinforce positive effort to keep workers safe

Safety recognition can be as simple as giving someone an Atta boy; giving out safety recognition awards (bling); acknowledging the safety efforts of someone at a Mass Meeting (I call this praising publically) in order for everyone on the project to know the What and Why of the acknowledgement; and also recording these positive acts of good safety effort on a project log.

Safety recognition means that you are acknowledging people you see doing the right thing, i.e. when those people follow company policies and procedures and most of all are working safe. Recognition reinforces right behavior and it becomes infectious. When others see it they do the right thing and also get recognized for their safety efforts. It also contributes to good project morale.

There is nothing like safety success on a daily basis. That success is viewed by me as Safety Perfection where everyone goes home safe each and every day. I say that because safety is always under construction. Right action has to be constantly applied to every operation, no matter how small, each and every day. The pursuit of safety perfection must be real, it must be relentless and it needs to be rewarded.

For more answers and insight, I invite you to look at our book, *Safety Under Construction—A Quest for Safety Perfection Utilizing Inventive Thinking* where we discuss in depth the psychological aspects of safety that include how we are affected mentally, emotionally and physically. It is a must-read for individuals and anyone who wants to dramatically improve the Culture of Safety within your organization and make unlimited strides for safety success.

Go to: <http://www.SafetyUnderConstruction.com> in order to obtain a great sense of this newly published book on safety and risk. There you will see a representative preview and reviews of a book that needs to be read, taken to heart and shared. Lives depend on it.

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