CONSTRUCTION SAFETY WEEK

Daily Toolbox Talk: Encourage & Welcome New Ideas
Tuesday, May 7, 2024

Whether this is the first construction site you've been on, or your 50th, you've likely heard someone say "We're all responsible for safety". If we all agree that each of us bears an individual responsibility for our own safety and those around us, isn't it important that we encourage and welcome new ideas that contribute to safe outcomes? If we're going to charge everyone with responsibility for safety, we need to be willing to listen and respond to the concerns and suggestions of those bearing it.

Construction sites are filled with people of all experience levels and varying tolerance for risk, many which are also working together for the first time. Safety is the thing that connects us all because despite any of the other differences and competing priorities, we all want it and we need each other to get it and sustain it. Ask yourself, do you want to work in an environment where someone might not warn you of a safety hazard, or wouldn't bring forward a safety improvement idea that benefits everyone because they think their voice doesn't matter? Would you continue to speak up if you thought you would be ignored? If anyone regardless of role or experience level cares enough about job safety to speak up, we all have to respect them enough to consistently listen and act to ensure they continue to speak up in the future.

We need to work together to instill the individual obligation to speak up in everyone that sets foot on the project site. We can communicate this through safety orientation and training, daily task planning and safety briefings, regular safety meetings, and during routine crew engagements in the field. We build confidence in people when we demonstrate we mean what we say about speaking up, and we do that by acknowledging or crediting those that have spoken up and by taking prompt action to address their concern or support their new idea to make the work safer. It is critical that we all do our part to let others know that we value their voice, by consistently saying "Thank You" when they use it.

When initiating an interactive conversation, asking everyone for their opinion may not be enough. Sure, you'll hear from those that are comfortable speaking out in almost any situation, but what about those that usually quiet? Be sure to pull thoughts from the quiet folks, they often have great ideas and knowledge to share but unless asked, may keep it to themselves. Valuing every voice makes sure all team members have a chance to add ideas and are not restricted to the perceived best practice of the loudest voice on the crew. Instead, they are empowered to ask questions, challenge norms, share different ideas for improvement and solve problems in a collaborative and more effective manner. The dialogue created through everyone's contribution to the discussion brings forward all the expertise on the crew and leads to better hazard identification, and safety improvements in the work process. This is especially important when planning new or non-routine tasks, executing high-risk activities, or troubleshooting a work challenge or plan failure that requires a different approach. In these instances two-way dialogue is essential to ensure everyone understands the critical steps, where mistakes are most likely to happen, and the agreed upon process to make sure work is executed safely.

When a plan is communicated, ask specific questions to give people the opportunity to discuss concerns about the process/approach.

- Ask…
  - "Do you see any safety issues that we missed?"
  - "Is there anything we're asking you to do that doesn't make sense, or is unsafe?"
  - "Is there anything we're asking you to do that you've never done before?"
  - "Do you have everything you need to do the work safely?"

Including everyone in the discussion and helping them understand the "why" behind the way we do things, in addition to "how" to do it, leads to better understanding and safer outcomes. Creating a psychologically safe space for less experienced team members to ask questions, helps them be successful in meeting

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expectations of the plan, learn as an individual and build confidence in their abilities. You may find that the questions they ask may call out procedural deviations that have become normalized, or they may identify existing hazards that get overlooked by the experts they're taking direction from. Sometimes the inexperienced voice helps teams break through the "we've always done it this way" barrier, to find safer, more efficient ways of doing the work. At the same time, involving all of the voices of our experienced people helps ensure that safety-critical steps don't get missed. Our experienced crew members are critical to helping others understand the "Why" as well as the "what". Understanding why, helps us defend against the natural instinct to want to skip steps in order to save time.

Construction is a team sport. By encouraging and welcoming new ideas as well as sharing our past experiences and lessons learned, we can be sure we all return home safely at the end of the day.

