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BBS Improves Safety



Jon Kaufman is Vice President of KL&P Motivation, which offers web-based programs and e-learning platforms to help companies enhance and manage their safety culture. In this interview, Kaufman explains how KL&P incorporates behavior-based safety (BBS) into its programs and discusses the importance of BBS in improving safety at construction and demolition sites.

Please provide a brief description of your professional background and of your position as Vice President of KL&P Motivation.

We provide solutions to the Fortune 1000 in the fields of marketing and incentives. As early as 1975, I observed safety meetings at various client facilities, and I began to question the ways in which organizations can more effectively engage their employees. In 1989, we started KL&P Marketing and Motivation to bring breakthrough ideas to our clients' audiences, whether they were internal or external.

KL&P Motivation offers web-based programs and e-learning platforms to help companies enhance and manage their safety culture. How successful have KL&P's online programs been in improving safety at construction and demolition sites?

KL&P developed a safety culture management system five years ago to provide a means in which companies can record, report and reward employee engagement. The system's web platform, combined with our consultation, enables a company to capture data on leading indicators, the best predictors of safety progress.

The system issues recognition and awards in the form of points given for four different achievements—discretionary effort by the employees, demonstrated habits and behaviors, completion of e-learning content (these tutorial and quiz modules are integrated into the platform) and management awards, such as annual milestones, housekeeping contests, etc. Many of our construction clients have seen immediate reductions in fleet incidents, workers' compensation claims and injury rates while experiencing increases in near-miss reports and involvement in a host of safety-related activities within the very first year. Several clients have seen incident rates reduce from the high 4's to less than 1.0 within a couple years.

KL&P Motivation supports BBS. How does KL&P incorporate this concept into its web-based programs?

If a company's perspective of BBS is about the empowerment of employees to observe, improve and involve themselves in their organization's safety and health efforts, then the safety culture management system is the perfect partner and enabler. All traditional activities, such as observations and continuous improvement actions, are functions that would still take place, and they would be recorded and rewarded within the system.

Why is BBS particularly important in reducing accidents and injuries at construction and demolition sites?

In my experience, the notion of BBS is effective, but it does not address all that is required. An important evolution from the days of just compliance and enforcement, BBS has had a beneficial impact. It is now widely accepted that the next evolution is the development of a strong safety culture, of which BBS is an integral component. Imagine a pot of stew boiling on your stove. Behavior-based activities such as observations would be some of the ingredients, along with near-miss reporting, proper PPE and so on. The ingredients sit in a broth, and if that broth is rancid, the entire stew is spoiled. Safety culture is that broth. It considers more than just the individual ingredients—the culture considers all systems in the organization and determines the success or failure of every program and initiative.

Some claim that BBS does not work on construction sites due to the transient workforce and challenges of the working environment. What experiences have you had that contradict this claim?

Union. Non-union. Contractors. Employees. Construction companies are unique given the dynamic ebb and flow of workers based on project requirements. That said, any quality construction company pays attention to developing the best crews of workers who can work safely and efficiently. Much training goes into creating teams, and they should not need to see their investment evaporate as workers move back to the union hall. The safety culture management system addresses this issue by allowing a company to keep these workers "in the family." Each worker has a personal account on the system and accumulates points in the four ways discussed every time they are on a job for the company. That motivates the good ones to come back.

How does KL&P Motivation ensure that its web-based programs meet the changing needs of those who work at construction and demolition sites?

The safety culture management system, when installed with a construction company, serves as a common tool everyone can use. System features, such as integrated e-learning with OSHA and MSHA content customized with the organization's equipment and procedures, a monthly newsletter, blogging tool and discretionary action items, reflect needs and wants. The safety committee chooses incentive awards linked on the site and provides suggestions and feedback. Updates, changes and modifications to the customized system can be accomplished quickly, reflecting the requests of the safety leadership.

What would you say to the smaller contractor who claims that investing in BBS systems will not yield any returns on investment?

What is their operational definition of BBS? If a small contractor is interested in instituting the basic core of BBS, an effective peer observation system can be implemented with virtually no cost. However, any contractor company should invest in creating a climate whereby reporting, prevention, compliance and education are recognized and rewarded. A shift must take place to concentrate on leading indicators rather than rely solely on lagging indicators. Small companies or large, job safety is assured when employees are engaged and motivated.

How can BBS best be implemented at a multilanguage worksite?

The safety culture management system can be accessed and used in a variety of languages. KL&P has vast experience in providing promotional material and literature in many different languages.

The online content presented to employees can be language-specific, but it is also important that we do not forget the forms, brochures and letters. Even banners and posters would be appreciated in various languages. We use several translation services that guide us to use the correct syntax and context.

Many ASSE members manage programs in other countries. Do you think the behavior-based safety concepts that KL&P Motivation promotes translates well in other countries?

It is a universally accepted notion that an organization's safety and health performance is tied to the overall profit performance. Productivity gains can only be sustained for long-term growth in a climate that honors and empowers the employee. No borders can keep out the common sense of employee engagement.

Based on KL&P Motivation's experience, what are the greatest challenges clients encounter when incorporating BBS into construction and demolition operations?

We have seen many obstacles in the way of instituting BBS in the workplace, all due to the context for which it is introduced. As mentioned, BBS methods are just an ingredient in the overall culture, yet it is often referred to as a panacea for all things. Unions tend to resist it because it fails to acknowledge the management and system-wide responsibilities. Workers and supervisors have distaste for the extra paperwork and time away from the job that can sometimes be required. However, if BBS is presented in the proper context as part of a larger safety culture improvement initiative, it will be successful. It is not a quick fix.

To the extent that management is committed to a five to seven-year process to instill a strong safety and health culture in their organization, steady and sustainable improvements will be seen in the lagging indicators, guided by the predictive benefits of leading indicators. Top management support is key to the success. Without it, safety personnel can feel like they are "pushing a rope."

Do you believe awards programs add to or detract from BBS implementation?

Our brains seem to be hardwired to want incentive in anything that we do. An old priest told me once that religion was the original incentive program, and heaven it's grand prize. We like to earn what we get by doing just a little bit above and beyond. In my opinion, incentive awards

have been misused in the past. Mind you, this observation comes from someone who has been in the incentive industry for more than 30 years.

For example, a common mistake in safety is the program that awards everyone a jacket when they hit one million man hours without a lost-time injury. Human nature dictates that workers who lop their finger off at 999,000 hours will put their hand into their pocket and will refrain from reporting the incident lest they disappoint hundreds of fellow workers. In 1980, I coined this phenomenon the “bloody pocket syndrome.”

The greater incentive in these organizations is to under-report incidents. Contrast this with a points-based system that ties the earning of points to employees’ proactive involvement in making a safe and healthy culture. Those points can be redeemed for awards of the employees’ own choosing and a time that might involve the family. The organization in this latter process gains a more effective employee who is motivated to give a little more effort. The awards are earned primarily for what they do in safety, not for what does not happen.

What are the key features of KL&P’s safety culture management system, and how did your own professional safety experience factor into the system’s development?

I was fortunate in the 1970s and 1980s to have worked with a true pioneer in the area of corporate cultures, Dr. Steve Simon. We began developing a working conversation about cultures in general and how it impacts corporations. My consultations with clients convinced me that the time had come for a dramatic sea-change in how serious safety improvement can be sustained in industry.

The first imperative, we surmised, was that employees must be fully engaged, requiring promotion, incentive and education. Management needed to wake up before being forced to climb “out of crisis,” as W. Edwards Deming has said. Short-term measures and rearview-mirror management needed to be replaced by the development of a new metric of leading indicators, those guideposts that give us a reading of employee involvement levels and best practices. We created the safety culture management system to provide the architecture for companies to monitor and improve the climate, and ultimately, the culture of their organizations by concentrating on safety performance.

The system consists of a web-based platform (hosted 24/7) that offers company news, reports and individual accounts with points for participation in safety activities, e-learning and behavior practices. Full consultation is provided to implement and administrate the system, with all rewards fulfilled to the employee’s home. Cost need not be expensive, and it should carry a significant return on investment from reduced compensation claims, incident lost time and so on.

How have those working in construction and demolition operations responded to the safety culture management system over the last five years? Has KL&P Motivation modified the system in any way based on their feedback?

Our construction clients have enjoyed our approach and our flexibility to customize the system to their requirements. Awards are delivered to their home, as opposed to the construction site. Communication is streamlined between multiple sites due to the program’s web-based accessibility. The onboard suggestion and feedback system allows for award ideas to be

included. The online newsletter allows us to spotlight certain employee role-models. All of this is responsive to input through the safety committee and other owners of the safety culture improvement process.

Does KL&P Motivation plan to develop other systems to help companies improve worker safety?

In the fifth year of implementation, KL&P's Safety Culture Management System is just at the beginning of its evolution. This year, we are launching a 2.0 upgrade to offer more robust e-learning content, a peer-to-peer award feature, blogging tool and other improvements designed to drive "bottom-up" participation. New management tools will enhance reporting capabilities to allow output of graphs and tables so that crew progress toward various goals can be better communicated.

E-learning technology is continually evolving. How does KL&P Motivation keep pace with new methods of course delivery?

Our safety culture management system uses robust content provided by our partners for delivery of OSHA and MSHA material. We offer this content in a form completely customized to reflect the client's shops, equipment yards, procedures and policies. These online-based courses are updated monthly and cater to a variety of learning styles. Some people learn by watching a multimedia tutorial followed by a short quiz to test retention. Others learn better through interactive engagement in the subject matter, much like a video game. We have incorporated several methods in our e-learning approach, and we call it Learn'nEarn. As participants complete various modules, their progress is recorded, and points are automatically transferred into their personal online account.

Biography

Jon Kaufman is a frequent speaker and exhibitor at several safety conferences throughout the year. Following decades of work with intentional communities and the rehabilitation of addicts and alcoholics, Kaufman began to apply creative and motivational techniques to the field of organizational culture change in the early 1980s. Clients such as GE, Tesoro Petroleum, Kroger and AT&T contract with KL&P to market and brand their messages in addition to provide incentive programs to increase sales and enhance safety and health performance. He heads a team of 18 at Kaufman, Levine & Partners, Inc. and can be reached at (800) 359-7995, x228.