

F O C U S

This
Month

Construction Safety



Safety leadership

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Ever heard the saying “The boss gets what the boss wants”? It’s true – good or bad, the project superintendent or project manager have a significant influence on the culture and safety on a construction site.

Leadership comes in many packages on a construction site. Many individuals, from laborers to project managers, play key roles in leadership and keep the project running.

Most of us hold support roles in the construction process and often don’t consider ourselves leaders, but we are. Maximizing production and minimizing distractions and risk is the balance most production foremen and superintendents live with each day. Construction is inherently risky.

For effective safety leadership, you have to be tuned into a number of critical factors to be successful.

What You See: On your rounds to monitor construction status and schedules, do you see the workers, or just the work?

Advanced safety training is becoming standard for construction leaders, but do we engage those safety skills routinely? What do you do if you see a worker taking an unacceptable risk?

If you choose to say something, is it constructive or destructive?

Obviously some constructive coaching could have a long-term compliance and production benefits and it could identify a training deficiency. Both resolutions are productive and sustainable. Berating the guy or, worse yet, ignoring it do not contribute to skill development and go a long way to establishing a negative, risk-accepting job site culture.

What You Hear: Leaders are often privy to worksite gossip, and some of the gossip may be about worksite near misses. (Did ya hear what happened to the electrician, Bob ...?)

These are often warning signs of job site safety disorders that left unmanaged can have catastrophic consequences.

If you ask, “is he all right?” first and finish up with “I’d like an incident analysis

and prevention plan in the morning,” you’re on the right track.

These minor, no injury incidents are your safety warning flares. These are your free data points that provide predictive insight into your real safety performance.

What You Do: You often hear people refer to the cost of safety, but consider the cost of not engaging an energetic safety program (fatalities, serious injuries, worker comps costs, project delays, enforcement actions and fines).

As a leader, if you tolerate flagrant risk-taking situations and don’t insist on safe work practices and safety planning, you are creating a potentially career-ending liability to yourself. This liability extends to your company, to your subcontractors, to your workers and to your clients.

Walking the walk and talking the talk on safety is a big influence on the safe outcome of your project.

Modern construction is a complicated balance of quality, production and

safety. Proper planning and developing your team will deliver all three. Safety records are becoming part of the selection criteria on many jobs these days.

Make safety part of your language, part of your management system and part of your reputation.

Safety is an investment, not a cost. Construction leadership is evolving and executing a safe project is part of that evolution.

Tropix Safety Consulting is an Austin-based safety consulting company. Tropix Safety Consulting specializes in construction site safety services and offers turn-key construction site safety programs and systems, as well as quality safety training. –dn



A new approach to back problems

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Uh, oh, another article on back problems. Is there REALLY anything new with regards to backs and back problems? Not really, however, back problems are so common that it probably justifies reviewing this common complaint again. The way of treating back problems has changed over the years. Doctors no longer advise patients with a sore back to become inactive. Lying on the floor, couch or staying in bed is NOT going to resolve back pain faster; staying mobile and active WILL.

How we treat back pain is more important than trying to determine what caused the pain in the first place. There are so many factors that contribute to a sore back that naming all of them would fill a book by itself. While prevention is a worthwhile endeavor, it will never solve the problem completely as long as humans continue to walk on two feet. Accepting back pain as a reality and changing our attitudes about it WILL speed recovery.

There are many things that people with back pain can do on their own to re-

cover. Some of these are:

- taking control and do not take back pain laying down – literally;
- modifying activities for a short time, if necessary;
- using over the counter medications to help control the pain.

To help control the pain the use of heat or cold may help relieve pain and relax the muscles. In the first 48 hours try cold packs for 5-10 minutes at a time. Some people prefer heat using a hot water bottle, shower or bath. A gentle massage may also be helpful to ease the pain and help relax the muscles. Anxiety, stress and muscle tension can increase the pain. Tension causes muscles to tighten and become painful. Stress can aggravate and prolong pain. Learn to relax. Exercise is also a good way to reduce stress and tension. Walking, swimming, dancing, yoga and exercise bikes are excellent methods of exercise that will help release tension and stress without further harming your back. Stay active. Even if pain is severe, most daily activities can be managed by working out a plan.

What are the things that will cause problems and how can they be dealt with? Can someone help or can things be done a different way? It may take “thinking outside the box,” but it can be done. The goal is to stay active without irritating the back pain too much. Do not stay in any one position too long. Move about before the muscles start to stiffen up.

Here are some suggestions for modifying common daily activities:

- Before sitting choose a chair and position that is comfortable.
- A pillow or support in the small of the back may help.
- When sitting at a desk, adjust the height of the chair and arrange the keyboard and monitor so that they are comfortable.
- Adjusting the seat and/or using a support for the back while driving may be helpful.
- In all of these activities, make sure to get up often and move around.
- When lifting or carrying objects, think about what is going to be carried or lifted.
- Keep the load close to the body, turn with the feet instead of the body.
- Divide the load between two hands and use wheels if possible.
- A firmer mattress or a board beneath the mattress may help with sleeping.
- Taking an over the counter medication i.e. aspirin or ibuprofen an hour before bedtime may help.

See a doctor if:

- there is numbness around your genital or anus;

- there is a feeling of pins and needles or numbness;
- or severe weakness that stays in both legs;
- or severe unsteadiness;
- or there is difficulty passing urine.

These symptoms are very rare, but do indicate a need to see a doctor right away.

What can a doctor do and not do? A doctor can make sure there is no serious disease, suggest medication or treatments to help control pain and advise on how to best deal with the pain and get on with life. A doctor cannot fix your back. It takes time, a positive attitude, and staying active.

This information was taken from “The Back Book” American version, published by TSO, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich NR3 1PD. For more information, go to www.tso.co.uk or to order the booklet go to www.balogh.com.

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