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Donald H Theune

Donnic Consulting Group LLC, USA

Changing unsafe attitudes and behaviours

Companies have spent millions of dollars on trainings, audits, guarding equipment and state-of-the-art PPE in an effort to prevent accidents and injuries. Nonetheless accidents and injuries continue to defy the best efforts of safety managers everywhere. The definition of insanity is 'doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.' The insanity is that companies continue to rely on programs that do not work –programs that are flawed. Flawed safety approaches and expectations share many attributes: Expecting a crisis to be an impetus for change. Hoping that fear will motivate change. Relying on facts and data to promote change. Hoping small changes over time will be cumulative enough to produce change. Tolerating limiting beliefs such as, 'it is very difficult to change one's behavior'. Companies that are committed to improving their safety record by reducing the incidence of accidents and injuries need a new and more comprehensive approach. They need to address the culture – 'the way we do things around here.' Over time, each company creates something I call the Culture Cobweb. It is composed of several actions and beliefs that keep you trapped in the 'way we do things around here' and keep you from making significant improvements and achieving Operating Excellence. In order to achieve Operating Excellence, eight key areas need to be addressed. Good communication must exist between first and second shift, operations and maintenance, labor and management, and, most importantly, person to person. Lack of trust within an organization may occur with downsizing, merging and off-shoring when there is limited information about the future – an example of poor communication causing lack of trust. Grudges are a major cause of distraction and irritation and can occur when there is a perceived insult or neglect. People withdraw from active participation when they feel that opinions are not respected and valued. The fear of reprisal and negative feedback limits interventions. Leaders need to be the safety role models by wearing by their PPE and following procedures. Unless all these issues are being addressed in a company, morale will be low. A poor sense of worth occurs when workers are not appreciated and that can seriously drag an organization down. They take risks and shortcuts when their mindset is 'it won't happen to me.' Distraction is also caused by problems with family, health, world events and even a boring job. The negative result of these eight key issues going unaddressed is that organizations remain trapped with limited success in any efforts to achieve operational excellence.

Biography

Donald Theune attended Rutgers University as a psychology major. He then did additional work in applied and theoretical statistics while a professional member of the American Society of Quality Control. He has extensive plant operations experience, having worked as a line operator while attending college and later advancing to supervisory and managerial positions. He has lectured on the subject of safety culture change for twenty-six years at over two hundred conferences and has authored numerous articles on applying safety culture change to a variety of industries.

donalddtheune@comcast.net

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