

RISK SIMPLIFIED

QUESTIONS:

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Using Feedback and Accountability to Reduce Losses

by Eric Lucero

If your entity provides regular safety training but is not showing visible signs of improvement, the issue may be related to a lack of feedback and accountability.

The earmarks of an effective safety program should be observable. When walking through a site, employees can be observed using carts instead of manually lifting items, they use of stepstools instead of standing on top of chairs, and so forth.

All employers want a tangible safety culture, but some struggle to make it a reality. The consistent application of feedback and accountability might be the missing link. Walk into any library to observe how consequences shape culture. Libraries maintain a culture of quietude because teachers and librarians have consistently applied positive and negative feedback as well as accountability to influence behavior. The same method can be used to create a culture of safety in your organization.

The following are examples of how to reduce acute and cumulative strain injuries using feedback and accountability:



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Observation	Supervisory Response	Reinforcement Type
Improper lifting technique (not bending legs, hunched back, twisting at the waist); or Not using carts or hand trucks when appropriate	1. Provide coaching session(s) 2. If the employee is not making a genuine effort to change, warn them that progressive disciplinary action is the next step. 3. Administer progressive disciplinary action.	Negative
Proper lifting technique (bending legs, straight back, looking forward); or Using carts or hand trucks when appropriate	1. Acknowledge the specific behavior in a genuine manner consistent with your personality.	Positive

Feedback and accountability are most effective when applied consistently and immediately following a targeted behavior. This may require supervisors to walk their site more frequently, but the return of investment, realized in reduced claims frequency and severity, makes it worthwhile.

Tips for Talking to Employees About Safety Behavior

- Focus on specific behaviors driving losses. To reduce falls from ladders, review accident investigation reports to identify specific behaviors contributing to injuries (e.g., not maintaining three points of contact, overreaching, unstable ladder, etc.).
- A rule of thumb is to provide five instances of positive reinforcement for every negative consequence.
- Provide specific, constructive feedback frequently. Do not say, “Good job” or “Be safe.” Instead, say, “Way to lift with your legs,” or, “When you twist at the waist instead of pivoting with your feet while lifting a load, I am worried it will eventually develop into a cumulative strain injury.”
- Do not solely focus on the employee level. Provide feedback on supervisory behaviors such as coaching, conducting tailgate safety meetings, and completing safety inspections.
- Coaching sessions are a two-way street for communication. Insight from employees may reveal competing priorities that force employees to choose between unsafe work practices or meeting a deadline.

It takes time and practice to capably speak to employees about their safety performance, but the reward is worth the effort. Contact [PRISM's Risk Control Department](#) for questions or assistance.