

Leading Safety Conversations



To achieve higher safety performance, senior leaders need to address the weak signals which are hidden from sight including those areas which people are reluctant to speak about.

Relationships are vital in humans; we need them to survive and thrive and we rely on the quality of information we receive.

To change the behaviour of a group, you must first become part of it. This starts with a conversation, so speak to the members of the workforce.

Thoughts, emotions, beliefs and relationships are very difficult to measure, but are the most influential part of teamwork. As a leader, this is what you need to identify and work alongside to improve safety performance, because safety culture and organisational culture are linked.



7 Steps to Leading Safety Conversations

Key skills 4 – Monitoring

- Quality over quantity
- Discuss outputs
- What are the themes?

Observe & engage

- Observe the work environment
- When safe introduce yourself
- Build rapport – don't talk about work too soon, find common ground
- A friendly chat – Ask how they are, talk about sport, family, the weather

Key skill 1 – Rapport

- Build a sense of trust
- Smile, relax
- I like you, you like me

Follow-up

- Write up the outputs and ensure they are followed up
- Respond back to any questions
- Reflect about the conversation
- Discuss the quality of the conversations with your team and line manager
- Are there any themes?

Recognise

- Recognise good behaviour
- “Work seems to be going well, do you have time to talk me through it?”
- A simple well done or thank you can be motivating to the workforce and shows you are interested

Thanks

- Let them know you are grateful for their time and input
- Leave them with a good impression
- Good conversations create a positive opportunity to engage with the workforce & supply chain



Discuss

- Once rapport has been built discuss the works observed
- Discuss what it's like to work there, what makes their job difficult, what helps them to do their job well, has their work changed over the years?
- Can you use “In an ideal world what would this look like?”

Key skill 3 – feedback

- Make it genuine, timely and specific
- Meaningful and actionable

Ask

- Do they have any questions for you?
- Answer them honestly and politely
- If you are unable to answer or provide immediate help, let them know when you will get back to them

Agree

- Are there any changes which would help make the task safer?
- Would any extra planning be required?
- What would good look like and what could be done to get there?
- Agree what the way forward is

Key skill 2 – Active listening

- Pay attention
- Withhold judgement
- Clarify and summarise

Hints and Tips for Leading a Safety Conversation

Preparation

A conversation can be held in an office, over a cup of coffee in the canteen and at a physical task location on a site.

Think in advance as to which location to visit:

1. What work is going on?
2. Will you be a distraction to a safety critical process?

Is there a safety culture message of the month or campaign you can discuss such as mental health awareness week?

3. If so, think about, where to find information, is there anything you can take such as leaflets etc.?
4. Think in advance the types of questions you can ask around it, e.g. What have you heard about this month's campaign on ...? Have you experience of it? How could it impact on you at work?
5. Use your own examples as stories.
6. How does it link to safety?

If there is no message of the month, think about your own personal values and vision and how you can bring that into a conversation.

Plan the time in your calendar and keep the appointment. This shows your commitment and engagement to the workforce.

Let the Manager know in advance you are going and meet with different team members and always make sure you set a strong example when you are on site (correct PPE, following sites rules etc).

Building Rapport

When a person feels put down, unsure what is happening, micromanaged, excluded or mistreated, they will automatically react in a fear mode and go into either a fight, flight or freeze response.

Therefore, before chatting about safety you must first build rapport and then build trust.

Before your first words take a few seconds to look at the surroundings for conversation starters such as photos, awards or anything which has been given a prominent position.

1. Show interest in them and ask questions about them, their job, their family.
2. Share stories; sharing your own stories shows you are human and also vulnerable.
3. Listen to the words, the tone and volume. Pay attention to what they are saying and if you are just getting short answers you have not built rapport yet.
4. Look for emotional cues such as excitement, annoyance and body language.

When rapport has been built people are more likely to engage in positive, cooperative behaviour which in turn increases employees to share ideas and new ways of working together.

Psychology of Positive Work Relationships

The desire to feel connected to others is a basic human need. Interpersonal relationships have a significant impact on mental health and physical wellbeing.

Positive social interactions at work directly affect the body's ability to build, maintain and repair itself

The brain releases chemicals (hormones) in response to good social interactions, and these chemicals are linked to trust and motivation.

Giving genuine praise lights up the reward receptors in the brain, so include positive findings.

When we feel trust, cooperation and fairness, the reward centre of the brain activates, and employees believe the best in each other. It inspires us to do our best.

Do

1. Introduce yourself
2. Use open questions and active listening
3. Be genuine and friendly
4. Stay professional and polite
5. Lead by example, coach, use integrity and involve the workforce
6. Think of the workforce as experts
7. Try to understand what the job is and any issues they raise
8. Look for success/commitment
9. Remember who they are for next time you see them
10. Make it a regular occurrence
11. Regularly discuss your interactions with your line manager and reflect qualitatively on the conversations.

Don't

1. Don't stop someone when it may be dangerous or inconvenient
2. Don't use closed questions
3. Don't think you have the answers; technological advances mean equipment and ideas change rapidly
4. Don't treat employees disrespectfully
5. Don't offer help when you can't help
6. Don't give a promise you are not able to keep
7. Don't interrupt a tea break or lunch

Self-Reflection

1. Did it feel a natural conversation?
2. Were open questions used?
3. Did I use proactive questions?
4. Was something praised?
5. Can the promises I made be followed up?
6. Did it feel enjoyable?
7. **Will anything be different as a result of the conversation?**
8. Did I listen to their ideas?
9. Did I present our Safety Vision with clarity?
10. Did I come across as a genuine promoter of safety?
11. What could I do differently next time?

“ To help you get the most out of the conversation, engage in a positive way and build constructive social interactions with the employees ”

