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Improving Safety in the Workplace with a Focus on the Trucking Industry
Safety First: When Saving Dollars Makes Sense



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Table of Contents

Executive Summary 2

Work Safety Scale Study 3

The DOT Doctor 5

Safety First 5

 Safety as a Culture..... 7

Trucking’s New Watchdog: CSA 2010 7

 Purpose of CSA 2010..... 8

 Economic Consequences of CSA 2010..... 9

Conclusion 10

References..... 11

Executive Summary

This paper includes a discussion on how to improve safety in the workplace with a focus on the trucking industry. Implementation of a “Safety First” or “Zero Incident” culture is a necessity to remain in business. Companies that neglect to put safety first are finding themselves faced with high fines or bankrupt. The latest government regulations for the trucking industry can place a carrier out of service for non-compliance upon first incident.

Safety can be accompanied by a hefty price tag. For those who are not compliant, the “catch-up” may be a costly endeavor. Once a “Safety First” culture is adopted by your company and championed from within the top management, there are a myriad of means to save money. Companies that adopt a safety program that originates with executive management and is followed through by floor supervisors are the most successful. Workers take their cues from their leaders. Supervisors who work safely produce safe workers. Safe workers produce a less stressful environment that leads to higher work satisfaction and lower turnover rates. Hayes and team proved this cause and effect relationship in their 1998 study of the Work Safety Scale.

Additionally, new safety regulations have befallen the trucking industry. CSA 2010, the new measure of safety in trucking, has changed the way many trucking companies do business. This 90-day continuous update system is a quick way to excel over the competition or end up out of business. Workplace safety, in the warehouse or on the highway, can no longer be ignored. It is mandatory to work safely and compliant in order to remain in business.

This paper reviews how companies can profit from being safe. A two decade, firsthand account of instilling a “Safety First” culture in various workplaces is discussed. Tips on how to make any working environment safe is covered along with the resulting awards. Sources on how to obtain safety training are contained within this paper.

Improving Safety in the Workplace with a Focus on the Trucking Industry

Unsafe practices in the workplace cost businesses billions of dollars, millions of lost days and thousands of deaths each year according to the National Safety Council (Williams, 2006). Workers who fail to properly wear their safety gear or work in a safe manner injure not only themselves but also their co-workers. Most of these injuries can be avoided by practicing “Safety First”. Following a few simple rules and instilling a champion for safety in one’s business will reduce injuries, improve safety ratings, reduce insurance costs and potentially extend the life of the business.

Small businesses are the most susceptible to workplace injury because they do not have the resources to absorb the cost. Trucking companies cannot afford a highway “Rambo”. Many small and medium sized trucking companies are one accident away from bankruptcy. With the enforcement of the new CSA 2010 regulations, trucking companies risk government intervention and shutdown for allowing drivers to operate in an unsafe and non-compliant manner. Dr. Sitler (2010) discusses how the CSA 2010 initiative will change the face of trucking in her white paper, *Debunking CSA 2010*. Enforcement of this new safety standard is a dual edge sword in that while it will potentially improve highway safety; it will potentially bankrupt many trucking companies and owner-operators in the process.

Work Safety Scale Study

Bob E. Hayes, Jill Perander, Tara Smecko and Jennifer Trask conducted a study to measure workplace safety. Their goal was to develop and validate the Work Safety Scale (WSS). The results were published in 1998. At the time of their study, the researchers knew of only “four measures of perceptions of workplace safety: (a) the Occupational Hazards Survey

(OHS), (b) the Safety Climate Survey, (c) the Physical Demands Scale (PDD), and (d) the Perceptions of Workplace Hazards Scale (PWHS)”(p.146). Their focus was a deeper look into the cause and effect of workplace accidents thereby drawing correlations between work environment, job satisfaction, stress levels, workplace and supervisor perception of safety as well as various other environmental and psychological factors. The researchers concluded that, “WSS subscales were logically related to job stress, psychological complaints, physical complaints, and sleep complaints” (p.145). “Best predictors of accidents were management safety and job safety. The best predictor of compliance with safety behaviors was supervisor safety and coworker safety” (p.156). Furthermore, “management safety practices and supervisor safety subscales were among the best predictors of accidents, job satisfaction, and compliance with safety behaviors” (p.157).

From the findings of Hayes et al. (1998), predictive patterns can be developed. Workers with a consistent pattern of “near misses” allows for the logical conclusion that said worker is a prime candidate for an industrial accident. Supervisors that monitor this type of pattern in their workers can be proactive and schedule an intervention. “Near miss” employees should be provided with counseling and retraining. Discovery yields the underlying causes of this type of behavior during many interventions. Often domestic issues have drawn the worker’s attention creating a temporary unsafe work interval. Workers that have developed unsafe work habits in general will require complete “reprogramming” to become a retainable employee. Observation and counseling should be able to determine which type of worker you are addressing. In the end, supervisors that value safety and lead by example create the safest work environments with the lowest job stress levels and fewest complaints.

The DOT Doctor

The DOT Doctor is my workplace. We cater to teaching others how to work safely. It is our responsibility to our clients to instill a “Safety First” culture at each of their locations. We specialize in DOT safety. Our main clients are small to medium sized trucking companies in need of DOT (Department of Transportation) compliance improvement. This is especially true as we are crossing the one-year anniversary point of the new CSA 2010 compliance regulations.

What we, at The DOT Doctor, have witnessed is the implementation of the Hayes et al. findings; as well as those from similar studies such as the National Council on Compensation Insurance, Inc. (NCCI), who collects worker’s compensation data, other parties in risk management and insurance firms. Insurers base next year’s rates on past practices. Companies with zero lost workdays, low worker’s compensation claim rates and good drivers score higher thereby saving money on their premiums. The DOT Doctor teaches companies how to save these dollars thereby allowing them to invest in other areas within their business. This extends company life, allows for greater worker satisfaction due to increased bonuses or pay rates and a higher return on investment for the owners and stockholders.

Safety First

“Safety First” is not a slogan but a way of life. The reins to the safety department at BPAC Transportation were handed to me in 1989 and my first order of business was to create a safe working environment both on and off the highway. Gleaming bits and pieces from various other organizations in combination with my training, background and incorporation of logical processes, a “Safety First” cultural outline was created for the company. During the implementation process, there were tweaks, changes and additions. Through trial and error, we learned to incorporate the idea throughout the company.

Safety is not something just for the highway or the shop. It is an organizational mindset that allows for safe actions and deeds to become the focus of each individual. In doing so, one's actions are guided through this mindset. Safe actions are the determining factor in the decision-making process, both at home and work, once such a program is successfully implemented.

Safe workers are healthier workers. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health discusses this topic in their 2009 document entitled, "The Essential Elements of Effective Workplace Programs for Worker Health and Wellbeing". This work "identifies 20 components of a comprehensive, work-based health protection and health promotion program for organizations creating programs to sustain and improve worker health" (CDC, 2009). The correlation was proven twenty years earlier in a firsthand analysis during my tenure at BPAC Transportation by the rise in our safety status and the reduction in missed days due to illness.

The "Safety First" cultural program that was born at BPAC Transportation has been customized for numerous clients since my transition into safety consulting over 10 years ago. Businesses that have implemented this program have benefited in many of the same ways that was experienced at BPAC Transportation. Other safety professionals have developed similar programs in their approach to a "Safety First" or "Zero Incident" program. David L. Goetsch (2009) presents a 10-step approach to creating a "Safety First" culture in his book, *Establishing a Safety-First Corporate Culture in Your Organization: An Integrated Approach for Safety Professionals and Safety Committees*. Mr. Goetsch builds on the same principles as my program. He outlines his safety program in easy to follow, do-it-yourself steps in his book.

Safety as a Culture

Focusing on safety as a culture instead of a directive allows for cross-departmental implementation. The entire company is working for a common goal instead of departmentalized goals. Labeling of chemicals, hazardous material awareness, proper cargo securement, ergonomics, safe lifting techniques, advanced driver training, pest control, proper hand washing and sanitizing procedures, healthy lifestyle initiatives (e.g. quit smoking, exercise programs, low-fat cook classes) and annual physicals are part of this directive. By encompassing all aspects of one's life, you train the employee to think safely.

This mindset and these actions carry over into the home where the employee shares safety tips with the family thereby completing the safety cycle. When the family acts in a more safe fashion there are fewer household accidents, which then allows for a reduction of the healthcare or medical insurance rate.

Each year, incidents should decrease along with corresponding insurance rates. Worker satisfactions should increase due to safer working conditions that lead to higher job satisfaction. Satisfied workers are retained workers. Lower turnover rates equals lower training and recruiting costs. By placing safety in the forefront of your business, expenditures are reduced in a myriad of ways.

Trucking's New Watchdog: CSA 2010

Government regulations have added additional qualifications onto any organization that wishes to subscribe to a "Safety First" regiment. CSA 2010 was introduced into the trucking arena last year. This is a new method of calculating highway safety and DOT compliance.

SAFER, the former carrier safety rating system, has been replaced by this new system. Compliance, Safety and Accountability (CSA) 2010 is a comprehensive program that measures driver, equipment and company safety. Algorithms calculate a weighted score that is then compared against peer companies, divided by fleet size, to determine one's ranking, hence standings. These standings or ratings have been met with great scrutiny and criticism, as the information is made available to the public. Injunctions have been filed due to lawsuits. The American Trucking Association (ATA) as well as OOIDA (Owner Operators Independent Drivers Association) support the initiative in theory however, each organization have voiced their own contentions on varying points.

Despite all the opposition, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) forges onward. Companies are now being forced to keep their records current, train their drivers properly, maintain their vehicles and operate within the hours-of-service (HOS) regulations. Statistics are a rolling calculation that no longer allows bad deeds to be "sweep under the rug". Companies are losing hauling contracts as they fail to comply with these new regulations. Standings change every 90 days and with them, the insurance rating that is based on these calculations. SAFER subscribed to a two-year system of calculation allowing ample time for the offset of poor behavior. Rolling calendars and 90-day updates translates to suspension of operating privileges, low scores and possible the close of business for companies in non-compliance. CSA 2010 is a dramatic impact on many trucking operations.

Purpose of CSA 2010

The true purpose of the program is to offer a well-rounded, intervention approach for early identification of potential non-safe actions. Just as the opening authors of the WSS study discussed cause and effect, the same standards are applied to the CSA 2010 program. The

concept is to improve driver fitness, reduce fatigue, produce better-trained drivers, identify and remove drivers from our roadways with drug and/or alcohol problems, ensure vehicles are properly maintained and cargo is secure. These same items have been regulated for over forty-years however, enforcement has been lacking. As John Hill (2010), former FMCSA Administrator, reminds us in his address to the Indianapolis Traffic Club, less than 2% of the total carrier population has been reached on an annual basis. The CSA 2010 program was created to broaden the reach and improve highway safety.

Economic Consequences of CSA 2010

The purpose of CSA 2010 is valid. The implementation date, though over 3-years in the making, is in poor taste due to the current economic times of our nation. Implementation of CSA 2010 standards on many trucking companies is staggering. Initially, those who rate in the lower 10% will be forced to install electronic onboard recording devices (EOBR) or lose their operating authority. The FMCSA announced in January that by 2015, all carriers who are required to carry a logbook must operate EOBRs according to the February 4 article in CCM Magazine by Aaron Huff (2011). Federal regulation, 49 CFR §395.16 takes effect in June 2012 but will not be enforceable until 2015.

The average cost per unit of an EOBR is \$2500 plus the man hours needed for monitoring. This is not economically feasible for many smaller trucking companies even in a good economy. Companies will incur additional costs in their hiring process due to new regulations regarding hiring regulations and driver qualifications. This is a major concern in an industry with an excessively high turnover rate. Maintenance costs will increase in an effort to ensure compliance. At a time when fuel costs are at their highest and commerce is low, CSA

2010 can easily be what breaks the bank for small business truckers and owner-operators. The government's newest safety program is forcing all trucking companies to put safety first.

Conclusion

“Safety pays” is the cry of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the slogan for their latest program (2010). As many of us have proven, yes, safety does pay however, safety also costs. Just as it costs green to go green, there are initial increases in costs to become compliant and safety orientated. Once a “Safety First” culture is established, many rewards are reaped. Growing pains or rather changing pains are often experienced during the implementation period. This time can “make or break” a company.

Choosing the right safety initiative that is customized to your business is critical to the success factor. Trucking companies that fail to make a commitment to safety will no longer be able to survive. Funding, as well as a desire to be safe, is the key to success. Those who choose otherwise will be down in government regulations and fines or assimilated into one of the trucking giants like Swift or Schneider through their many “take-over” scenarios.

Whatever approach a business chooses to improve their workplace safety statistics, it is important to secure this cultural change from the top downward. Businesses that departmentalize safety or look for a means of “complying just enough to meet government standards” are companies who are planning to fail. The owner has to want change. As discussed, the supervisors lead the charge to safety. Just as Mahatma Gandhi (1913) taught us to be the change you want to see, so must top management be that change for safety is contagious. Workers mimic the actions of their superiors. Effecting change and instilling a safe working culture requires a true commitment of the leadership of that organization. Be a champion for your company and put “Safety First”.

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