Productivity is an expression of how efficiently and effectively goods and services are being produced. To include health and safety measures to the list of productivity-improving techniques at workplaces is gaining popularity in recent years. But does safety hinder work productivity? Risk Management would like to tackle long-standing debate in the health and safety field.

Workplace Impressions of Safety as a Waste on Productivity: Diving Deeper
Source: www.EHStoday.com

No matter how many times the point is argued, the relationship between safety and productivity remains contentious. There are still too many companies and too many working cultures that view safety training, lock-out practices, and the careful plans health and safety professionals have designed to keep workers healthy and safe as productivity bottlenecks.

Safety doesn’t stand in the way of productivity; safety IS productivity.

No one gets paid for not having accidents, but reductions in injury rates will increase a workplace’s overall effectiveness in providing services and an increase in workplace morale.

The small gains made in production by shortcutting safety seem to be worthwhile until an accident occurs. Then the gains disappear or even become losses in many cases.

Lost productivity is not the only cost of safety failures. There are direct costs related to emergency response and medical care, lost time of employees in production, workers’ compensation insurance premiums, potential fines from regulatory agencies, and litigation from injured workers or their families. Moreover, there are also possible indirect costs related to accidents, including reduced productivity due to lack of experienced workers in the absence of injured workers, lowered morale in the workplace, and problems recruiting new workers.
Safety Versus Productivity (continued)

Connecting the Disconnect between Safety and Productivity
Source: www.EHStoday.com

Safety vs. Production

Many employees feel productivity pulls them in one direction while safety tugs in the other. Strategies which incorporate safety into everyday productivity provide simplified direction to everyday choices. The lack of incorporation of safety when producing a work product, can cause confusion when two priorities seem to conflict.

Workers who have been given no strategy, have no vision of the relationship between safety and productivity that leaders would prefer. Leaders with no safety strategy often are specialists in one or more aspects of the business who tend to delegate the other aspects they are unfamiliar with to specialists.

Such delegation creates silos, and safety is one of them. Silos create dichotomies that only overarching strategies can fully overcome. When supervisors direct day-to-day work productivity, and safety professionals direct safety, workers are faced with choices that are incorrect or incomplete.

Organizational and Safety Strategies Should Compliment Each Other.

In organizations that have safety strategies, all too often they were developed by the safety department while organizational leaders created the business strategies with no correlation between the two. Although strategy can create direction, conflicting strategies don’t. In fact, when strategies conflict, the dichotomy is even more confusing for workers.

Improve Communication From the Boardroom to the Office Floor

Poor communication of the strategy is a common cause. Few organizations communicate effectively from the boardroom to the office floor. Many leaders tend to believe that a clear message sent once is communication. The lack of follow-up communication can completely undo the initial message. Another common cause is a lack of accountability. Even if strategy is effectively communicated, accountability is what gives it traction. Constantly, reinforcing the level of expectation through feedback and coaching is necessary to make strategy turn into practice.

Incorporate Safety in Daily Conversations, Audits, and Annual Performance Appraisals

Too few organizations carefully define the roles, responsibilities, and results (RRRs) they expect of each position in regards to safety. Excellent organizations carefully define these RRRs, audit areas for improvement, and constantly enforce and improve them. They refer to the RRRs in informal conversations, and formally include them in performance appraisals.

Ask Your Employees: Which is More Important, Safety or Productivity?

Listen closely to their answers, and probe to understand the influences on their perceptions. Remember that your workplace is perfectly aligned to give you the performance you currently are getting; and to change performance, you must change the factors forming the ideas around productivity and safety.

Safety Versus Productivity (continued)

What Insurance Experts Have to Say About Safety

Safety has a direct effect on Insurance Premiums.
Source: www.lanierupshaw.com

Having a sound safety program can provide organizations with a lower experience MOD rate.

An Experience MOD rate, in a nutshell, compares an organization’s workers compensation claims experience to other employers of similar size operating in the same type of business.

The higher the MOD factor, the higher the premium.

Workplace Risk Affects Cost More Than Premiums
Source: www.gilbertrisksolutions.com

Injuries and illness in the workplace cost much more than increased insurance premiums. When someone must take time off from work, it lowers productivity and reduces profits. If a skilled worker cannot return to work, you’ll need to recruit and train a new employee, which costs substantial time and money.

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