Assurex GLOBAL | Construction Practice Group

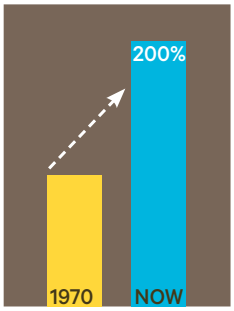
Building a Commitment to WORKPLACE SAFETY

A WHITE PAPER FOR CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTORS

Overview

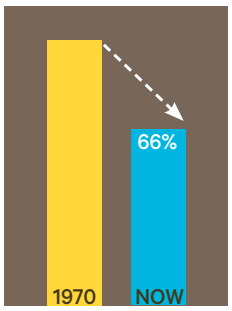
Since the dawn of the industrial revolution—and particularly within the last 50 years—there has been marked, continuous improvement in workplace safety. Companies have invested in personal protective equipment (PPE), such as hard hats, safety masks and eyewear, flame-resistant clothing, chemical-resistant gloves and earplugs. They've also developed safety management systems to identify hazards and control risks. In addition, the formation of the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) 45 years ago has helped dramatically improve workplace safety.

U.S. Employment



Since 1970, work-related fatalities have decreased more than 66 percent and occupational injuries and illnesses have dropped 67 percent, according to OSHA. These statistics are even more impressive when you consider that U.S. employment has nearly doubled in that time period. Worker deaths in America are down on average from approximately 38 fatalities per day in 1970 to 12 a day in 2013.

Work-Related Fatalities

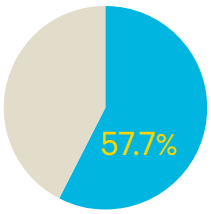


However, any workplace death or injury is one too many. Having top-of-the-line PPE and well-written safety management procedures simply isn't enough. The effectiveness of behavior-based safety processes in reducing incidents and injuries requires one essential ingredient—complete psychological commitment.

This white paper encompasses views on building a commitment to workplace safety posited by D.J. Moran, Ph.D., who specializes in behavior-based safety (BBS) approaches. "Behavior-based safety has a legacy of helping people lead better and more healthful lives," says Moran, owner of Pickslyde™ Consulting. Applying BBS approaches, which hinge on behavioral psychology, can double specific voluntary safety behaviors among construction workers, says Moran. That should make all general contractors sit up and take notice when you consider OSHA's statistics on the construction industry.

Out of more than 4,100 worker fatalities in private industry during 2013, approximately 20 percent were in construction. The four leading causes of worker death on construction sites were falls, being struck by an object, electrocution and being caught-in or between hazards. These "fatal four," as OSHA calls them, were responsible for 57.7 percent of construction worker deaths in 2013.

"It *is* possible to reduce negative occupational habits and decrease errors in the workplace," says Moran. "It requires a commitment to safety."



LEADING CAUSES OF WORKER DEATH

- FALLS
- BEING STRUCK BY AN OBJECT
- ELECTROCUTION
- BEING CAUGHT-IN OR BETWEEN HAZARDS

Section 1:
An Introduction to Safety Commitment

Section 2:
External versus Internal Safety

Section 3:
Six Components of Safety Commitment

ABOUT DR. D.J. MORAN

Dr. D.J. Moran is founder of Pickslyde Consulting and senior vice president of Quality Safety Edge (QSE). He earned his Ph.D. in clinical/school psychology from Hofstra University. Moran has 20 years of experience applying behavioral principles in clinical as well as business environments and has developed an innovative approach to building leadership commitment to safety improvement. As a board certified behavior analyst, Moran has conducted safety initiatives in a variety of industries, including pulp & paper, petroleum and construction.

Highlights of Moran's career include the following:

- Author of ***Building Safety Commitment,*** which demonstrates ways to increase people's dedication to workplace safety
- Current president of the Association for Contextual Behavioral Sciences
- Founder of the MidAmerican Psychological Institute in Chicago
- Television appearances as an expert on ***Hoarding: Buried Alive, Confessions: Animal Hoarding*** and FOX News broadcasts
- Co-author of ***ACT in Practice***, a professional book focused on complex, applied behavior analysis

www.pickslyde.com

SECTION 1:

AN INTRODUCTION TO SAFETY COMMITMENT

FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS, D.J. MORAN, PH.D., HAS STUDIED AND DEVELOPED the concepts of Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACTraining), which aims to improve performance and reduce stress for workers by supporting psychological flexibility on the job. While "psychological flexibility" may sound like some esoteric concept out of a textbook, it's actually fairly simple.

"It's the ability for people to be in the current moment, mindfully aware of thoughts and emotions and committed to valued goals,"

says Moran. "Organizations and corporations benefit when leaders, managers and front-line workers are psychologically flexible."

Though Moran had spent years studying the science of human behavior, he didn't link the principles to workplace safety until he had a casual conversation with his brother-in-law, who works in the steel industry. He recalls his brother-in-law asking, "If you can help autistic kids to speak and schizophrenic people become more functional, can you get my boilermakers to just wear their hard hats?"

Moran accepted the challenge. But his mission wasn't as easy as getting construction workers to use PPE or companies to implement safety policies. "All of that stuff is important, but it doesn't work on its own. It requires a commitment to safety," he says. "You can have fantastic fall protection, but if people are climbing up 16-foot ladders without wearing it, then it's not helpful." Employees must be ***committed*** to wearing fall protection gear.

Commitment is an essential tenet to safety programs at all organizational levels. "For optimal performance, front-line employees must commit to following through on their training and wearing PPE, while managers must commit to overseeing the safety process and promoting safety as a key organizational value," says Moran. "If you take a close look at industry research, it's clear that those leaders who commit to the stewardship of the entire safety process have the most impact on safety performance."

So what, exactly, is commitment? In short, it's actions aimed in the direction of what is important to you (what you value most), even in the presence of obstacles.

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People who go through specific training programs that integrate behavioral science to improve their workplace safety commitment reap the following benefits:

- Fewer errors on the job
- A greater ability to master new training
- An accelerated rate of adopting new work methods
- An increased propensity to innovate
- Better mental health
- Improved work competence

"We can change how people interact with each other, help them communicate and reward people for doing the right thing," says Moran. "We teach people to observe whether or not they and their co-workers are behaving safely and give appropriate feedback so it has an impact on that person."

SECTION 2:
EXTERNAL VERSUS INTERNAL SAFETY

Before delving into methods for shoring up employees' commitment to safety, it's important to examine how most construction companies tackle the topic of on-the-job safety. Nearly all companies focus solely on external safety—the outward pieces of an occupational safety and health program. External safety protocols are undoubtedly essential. They often focus on four areas:

1. Policies

Well-written guidelines clearly state the goals of the safety program in relation to other organizational values. They include step-by-step instructions for everything from hazard prevention to accident procedures, assigning responsibilities to managers, supervisors and employees.

2. Employees

Considerable attention is paid to what employees must do, including what PPE and tools are required and what's expected of employees in terms of hazard prevention, problem resolution, safety training and so on.

3. Training

Safety programs often dictate specific training for employees on topics such as personal protective equipment, fall protection, weather protection, chemical handling, demolition, crane usage, fire protection, hand and power tools, motorized equipment and more.

4. Management

Managers and supervisors have extra duties related to compliance with safety policies and evaluation of safety programs.

External safety concerns are important, but they aren't fully effective without an equal commitment to internal safety. "We don't talk about the internal world of safety very often," says Moran. "What goes on between your ears and behind your eyes has an impact on whether you are committed to acting safely."

Internal influences include all the issues and concerns that employees bring with them to work each day. Moran cites four primary internal challenges that threaten workplace safety:

1. Distractions

On average, people spend 47 percent of their days thinking about things other than what they are actively doing, says Moran. Their mind is somewhere else.

2. Frustrations

From long store lines to lost car keys, life's little frustrations add up and can intrude upon our work.

3. Lack of Motivation

Lots of people wake up each day and think, "I just don't feel like going to work today." Once at work, they procrastinate or put in a half-hearted effort.

4. Personal Issues

People bring their worries to work: How will I pay for my children's college? Is it time to consider a nursing home for my mother? What happens if my wife's medical tests come back positive?

Each employee's internal world affects the extent to which they follow an external safety program. Unfortunately, many people deal with internal challenges by trying to suppress or ignore them. That's the wrong approach, says Moran. Doing so will ultimately undermine efforts to create a safe external work environment.

It all hinges on the concept of psychological flexibility described earlier. According to Moran, psychological flexibility allows us to be in the present moment while also being aware of our thoughts and emotions without trying to change them or be adversely affected by them. "In other words, individuals with greater psychological flexibility are focused on the here-and-now when dealing with emotions and personally motivated to achieve significant objectives," says Moran. So, for example, they can acknowledge feeling angry with their teenager who missed curfew while simultaneously committing to work in a safe manner.

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SECTION 3:

6 COMPONENTS OF SAFETY COMMITMENT

Tying behavioral psychology to workplace safety may seem like a stretch, particularly for people who view the field of psychology with skepticism. Moran asks doubters to keep an open mind. "There's a science to human behavior—to figuring out in a replicable way how we can help reduce people's suffering and improve quality of life," says Moran.

Behavior-based safety is an extension of this, encouraging employees to acknowledge internal issues, understand the importance of external safety actions and draw on values-based motivation to attain workplace safety commitment. In his work with clients, Moran utilizes a tool—the Safety Plan Commitment Worksheet—with six steps for building the right mindset. They tie in to the following statement:

> *"I am here now, accepting the way I feel, noticing my thoughts, while doing what I care about."*

By breaking the statement into parts and considering each one, employees have a blueprint for committing to a safe work environment. The first four address internal safety issues, while the remaining two relate to external safety issues and values-based motivation respectively.

I Am

Take time to consider if you are influenced by any unhelpful self-descriptions. Are you hard on yourself for being unintelligent, slow or old? Do you look in the mirror and see a slacker, a coward or a pessimist? Moran encourages people to let go of anything unhelpful that they believe about themselves. "Notice that ***you*** are not your thoughts, emotions, sensations or roles," he says. "These are ***experiences*** you simply have."

Here Now

Center your situational awareness on what you are doing in the work environment. "Notice what is happening here-and-now," says Moran, "and let go of distracting thoughts about events that are out of your present control." Being situationally aware is crucial to keeping your commitments and maintaining optimal safety.

Despite what may be going on internally—concerns over unpaid bills or anticipation of an upcoming vacation—you need to focus on the external world. Are there any overhead hazards in the way of the aerial lift? Were all the buried utilities marked on the excavation site? Did you adequately secure the load to the fork-lift? Being 'in the moment' contributes to a safe work environment.

Accepting

Allow yourself to acknowledge any emotions you have without trying to control them. Be willing to accept those emotions while moving forward with safe and productive actions. "Trying not to feel what you're feeling has a negative impact on the way you perform," says Moran. Think of a 7-year-old baseball player at bat with the bases loaded and his father in the stands yelling, "Don't be nervous!" It's only natural to be nervous, but the father has asked his son to disregard his feelings. More productive advice would be to say, "Keep your eye on the ball, and swing level."

Construction workers on a job site need to accept feeling angry, bored, sad, confused and so on while remaining committed to safety. "If you want to accomplish anything, you have to accept the way you feel and still do the important things," says Moran.

Noticing

Prepare to simply notice thoughts that arise while you work. If those thoughts are not helpful, let them go. You can learn to treat distracting thoughts as disconnected from work tasks while choosing to act in a safe way. "Sometimes people don't do what's important to them because they are distracted by certain feelings or moods," says Moran. "You can learn to accept dealing with anger, frustration, nervousness or sadness, but the skill requires practice."

Doing

This is the simplest, but most important piece of the safety commitment plan. It entails figuring out what actionable things you will do to be safe on the construction site. There are hundreds of safety steps: Lift material bundles with a hoist, wear protective gloves, clean and inspect tools, remove potential fire hazards from welding areas and so on. You should create a checklist of actionable steps and find an accountability partner who can confirm whether you are following those steps. Managers need to announce the company's safety goals and culture, track progress of the safety program and create incentives for reaching goals.

What's Important to Me

Considering what you value most provides values-based motivation for committing to safety. "If people are just acting safely because OSHA tells them to, they'll only reach a certain level of safety," says Moran. "If they link safety to what's important to them, they'll get stronger in their commitment."

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Make a list of why you work and what you value. Sure, nearly everyone works to make money. But for what? Aside from food, shelter and clothing, we all have individual passions and goals. Maybe you enjoy remodeling antique cars, traveling abroad or playing the guitar. On a higher level, you care deeply about your family and friends. Consider what you truly value as an individual and find meaningful in your life. Then leverage those values to behave safely.

Once you've completed the safety commitment worksheet, you can commit to a safety declaration and move toward a better work environment:

"Because my health and the health of others is important to me, I am willing to address external and internal world obstacles that jeopardize safety and to work in a manner that reflects safety as my top value."

A Mindfulness Exercise

Set a phone alarm for one minute. After starting the alarm, be mindful of your breathing for one minute. Focus on the experience of inhaling and exhaling. If your mind begins to wander, be aware of the distractions and then gently guide yourself back to the one task at hand—paying attention to your breathing. Do this exercise each day for a week, and then gradually increase the time to two minutes, then five minutes.

Noticing and Accepting Exercise

Place a mint in the center of your mouth and take a deep breath. As you exhale, close your eyes or fix them on something around you. Keep the mint in the middle of your tongue: Don't swirl it around, bite on it or chew it. Become aware of what is happening to you and around you right now. Be fully aware of what you are experiencing as your mind throws many thoughts at you. You may be thinking, "I want to chew the mint" or "I've had enough of this stupid exercise." If your mind wanders, refocus on the present situation and the mint in your mouth. Notice your thoughts, accept your feelings and be aware of the situation. Stick with the exercise for three minutes and commit to this one action—keeping the mint in the center of your mouth.

You can transfer what you've learned from these two exercises to your daily activities on the construction site. "The stronger your situational awareness, the more likely you will be to maintain your safety commitment and not be distracted by thoughts, emotions and other obstacles," says Moran.

Exercises to Enhance Situational Awareness

D.J. Moran, Ph.D., suggests two exercises to help you become more aware of the here-and-now and notice as well as accept emotions and thoughts without getting sidetracked by them.

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