

Engaging supervisors in safety

Building systems, culture, and accountability that
strengthen from the top down



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Self-assessment questions

1. Does my organization have a clear set of standardized expectations around safety for supervisors?
2. Do my supervisors know what they are accountable for, and are these expectations explicitly documented?
3. Have my supervisors received any training when they took their positions that prepared them for their safety responsibilities?
4. Do my supervisors have access to resources and help from management for safety issues?
5. Does my organization have a systematic way they follow up with supervisors about safety?
6. Has my organization made deliberate decisions around the use of supervisors in the safety program?

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Learning Objectives

- Identify supervisor barriers
- Explore strategies for defining duties/accountability
- Apply frameworks to support supervisors in building a culture of safety

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The impact of supervisors

Supervisors are the bridge between policy and practice

Supervisors influence trust, reporting, and compliance

Supervisors have a more immediate relationship with their direct reports than others in the management line.

What would you say is the #1-way supervisors shape safety in your organization?

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Top 5 barriers supervisors face:

1. Unclear expectations, or unclear execution methods
2. Finding time for safety duties
3. Lack of support from management for safety
4. Organization has not utilized supervisors for safety
5. Supervisors are not supervising, they are working

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Supervisors knowing their role

Defining and specifying supervisory safety duties and expectations is important.

This information can be imparted in:

- Initial training for supervisors
- Written job performance expectations
- Regular meetings with direct management



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Safety duties and expectations

Organizations should clearly lay out for supervisors – *especially new supervisors* – what safety related duties and tasks they are expected to fulfill.

Management must be transparent with supervisors about how they:

- Measure safety performance
- Track safety performance
- Review supervisors on safety performance



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What are key safety duties of supervisors?

Possible supervisor safety duties might be:

- Ensuring safety policies and SOPs are being followed
- Providing safety stand- up meetings for crews
- Participating in accident and near-miss investigations
- Performing safety reviews of facilities and machinery

What are some other safety responsibilities your supervisors have in their job duties?

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Training for new supervisors

Initial training is a key opportunity for organizations to impart to new supervisor expectations, resources, and skills that relate to their new responsibilities.

Time spent addressing (soft) skills and the role of supervisors are especially helpful towards achieving safety effectiveness.

If you could add ONE skill to your supervisor training tomorrow, what would it be?

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Recommended training elements

- What safety responsibilities supervisors will be accountable for and how they will be measured
- Establishing health dynamics with direct reports
- Safety soft skills
- Industry best practices for known hazards of their jobs (creating safety champions in supervisors)
- Tasks that can help them achieve larger safety responsibilities
- Simulate scenarios of regularly occurring safety issues

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Management meetings

These meetings are surely already happening. Need to ensure that safety is a core piece of these meetings.

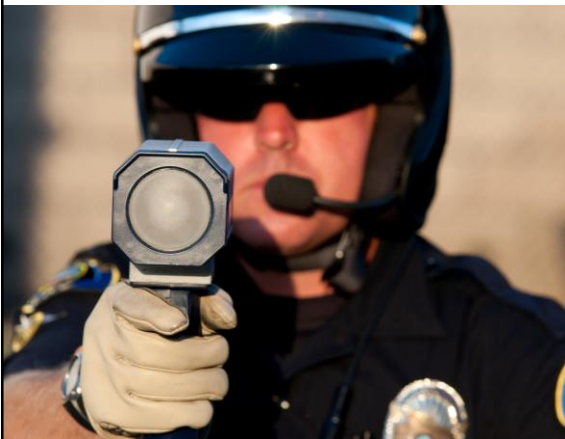
Topics to cover:

- Any incidents occurring since last meeting
- Safety concerns or hazards reported, and abatement
- Funding or personnel needs around safety
- Ways safety supervision can improve

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11



OR



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Safety Cop

vs

Safety Coach

Focus on finding violations and always looking to correct actions of others



Look for ways to maximize performance of those they influence



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Safety soft skills

These skills are consistent used beyond the safety world but have strong relevance in relation to safety duties.

- Method for accountability
- De-escalation of co-worker confrontation
- Explaining disciplinary decision to direct reports
- Trust-building methods within teams/groups

What other soft skills do you think are important for supervisors with safety responsibilities?

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Example: methods of accountability

- Explain expectations of the job
- Tell them the limits of the expectations
- Explain the resources and assistance available to the work, and offer more if needed
- Establish check in timeline on expectations and learning
- Outline the possible consequences and seek agreement

Without understanding and agreement to comply,
don't expect compliance.

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Scenario-based training

1. Management demanding task be done “safely, but on time”
2. Worker declines to wear required PPE
3. Contractor’s employees not following agreed-upon rules
4. Veteran employee defends failure to follow procedure
5. Habitual disregard by worker for SOP after retraining



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Management accountability

Management who oversee direct supervisors must also be held accountable

Are department directors and organization executives leading from the top on emphasizing supervisory safety excellence?

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Management undercutting supervisors

When workers do not think they can trust their supervisor, it impacts their interactions.

They are less likely to:

- Report accidents or near-misses
- Report hazards
- Give full engagement and effort to team
- Work beyond mere compliance or obligations

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Why top down for safety priorities

Management on all levels shapes how important safety is regarded. For measurable safety outcomes and subjective feelings of workers, the direct supervisor is more influential due to proximity.

The safety culture will come to be defined by the worst behavior that is tolerated by management and supervisors.

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What is safety culture?

The values, attitudes, information, skills, and behaviors of the members regarding workplace safety.

In a healthy organizational safety culture, we would expect management to support and push:

- Shared understanding of safety's importance
- Mutual trust
- Belief in prevention
- Individual acceptance of common rules

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What support supervisors need

Supervisors need management support to provide a system and structure that reinforces and supports the safety duties they undertake and the training they provide to their workers.

Supervisors need management to cultivate and maintain a culture of safety so that their actions and motives can be trusted.

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How supervisors influence safety

“At the individual level, the stronger an employee’s experience of her/his supervisor’s support for safety, the lower the employees injuries.

“The CEOs in our study do not have a direct impact on employee safety, they indirectly influence frontline safety by fostering a safety climate in the top management team that then trickles down to lower levels of the organization.

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“To influence frontline injuries, CEOs must rely on the collective experiences and effort of the top management team, and the proximal influences of supervisors on the frontlines...[note] the importance of internal consistency between espoused safety priorities at the top and local practices by supervisors to ensure workplace safety.”

From *Safety in the C-Suite: How Chief Executive Officers Influence Organizational Safety Climate and Employee Injuries*, in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2016, Vol 101, No. 9.

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Time to supervise

Supervisors need to be allocated time to supervise, coach, and model for direct reports.

Management can help by:

- Setting goals/expectations around supervising time
- Removing or prioritizing other tasks to free the supervisor
- Modeling this behavior in own interactions with supervisor

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Wrapping Up

Organizations need to be using supervisors more deliberately in their safety programs.

Must ensure supervisors have the tools and skills necessary to accomplish their jobs:

- Explicitly defined duties and expectations
- Established training program for current and new supervisors
- Management providing consistent culture of safety supporting supervisory work

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ANY
QUESTIONS
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