

Forklift Safety Is Management A Driving Force, Or A Roadblock?

If profit is so important to a business, why open the door to tremendous losses?

Why hurry to load \$200,000.00 worth of merchandise, if in the process you have an accident and it cost \$300,000.00 to settle?

The management of any company sets the tone, pace, and in most cases the level of involvement for the employees of that company.

To prove that point, have a manager, at any level; express the notion that tardiness will not be tolerated. Let that manager say that he will take serious corrective action on any employee that shows up late more than one time a month.

Then two months later, review the time cards. Even employees that had been chronically late two or three times a week will show a reduction in this practice. This is because the employee perceives this policy as “carved in stone”.

Now, let that same manager take no action on the employees who have violated the policy, and watch the result. The employees return to the status they were comfortable with. They no longer perceive the policy as serious, and therefore it is no threat to them.

No matter what policy the management dictates most employees will follow it unless it presents a serious danger to them.

There will be however a small percentage of employees that will attempt to ignore changes in policy because it is unfamiliar, and requires a change on their part. These are the employees that will be the main focus of the training program.

They can be taught. They can be convinced. It is up to you to present this material in such a way as to make it important enough to them to accept it and in doing so accept the change.

But, no matter how convincing you are, if management does not stand behind the very program they have mandated, it will become a shell of what it could be.

Management, by projecting to employees what is important, directs their business everyday. If management expresses a concern in a particular area, employees will respond.

This is not out of a concern in most cases that the employee will lose their job. Most employees want to see their position in the company as one that has meaning and purpose.

When the company succeeds, the employee is able to share in that success. When the company management is under a deadline, the employees are well aware of this and react accordingly.

So, if the company projects an attitude that unsafe operation of forklifts, or other unsafe practices will not be tolerated, the employees will react to this as well.

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The attitude, comments, and actions of all levels of management directly affect the reactions by the employees.

This is why I ask, “Is your management team a driving force, or a roadblock”?

If all levels of management do not accept the necessity and potential of a program, the program is damaged.

The information given to the different levels of management throughout the inception, and continuing presentation of this program is simple. “It is smart business to be safe”.

By teaching safety as well as we teach employees to be on time for work, safety becomes a normal part of the employee’s business day.

The management has to not only show a positive attitude in the initial phase of the program; they need to show continuing support as time passes.

Explain to members of management that failure in this program can not only result in the injury or death of an employee, it can affect every employee in the business including them.

Businesses budget for many things, office supplies, payroll, taxes, and insurance to name a few. But as stated earlier, one accident in the workplace can produce costs that were not budgeted for, and that can not be recovered.

I have talked to managers and supervisors who believe that training in safety is an unnecessary business expense. There are even those that are callous enough to believe that if an employee is injured, it is just a minor inconvenience because, “Now we have to find some one to replace them”.

One incident in particular was to me completely astounding. An untrained forklift driver struck a power line igniting a fire that burned down an apartment complex and post office in Florida.

After the incident, the contractor on the job was quoted as saying that the required forklift safety training was just a way to bleed companies dry and that the training did not accomplish anything. This statement was made after the employer had sent a number of employees for the training, just not this employee.

Is it possible that the operators who had been trained and were aware of the danger of working near power lines might have been a little more careful?

But, the statement did accomplish one thing; it assured his employees that they would never have to worry about losing their jobs over a safety issue. It also told them that the money he spent on trying to save their lives was in his opinion, a waste.

Finally, if another incident ever occurs with this same employer, and he is in court to defend his company against a very costly legal action, he will hear those words again. The employee’s attorney or the attorney of the employee’s family will make sure of that!

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Author and keynote speaker Kenneth Hutchins has over 30 years experience in the Security Industry serving as a Law Enforcement Specialist in the military and as a police officer in two civilian agencies in addition to Loss Prevention Management with some of America's largest retailers.

Mr. Hutchins' expertise in security, and safety combined with his entertaining presentations have made him a sought after keynote speaker in the private sector. Author of "Stealing Back Your Profits" a guide for small and mid-size business and of multiple safety programs Mr. Hutchins teaches at several community colleges around Texas.

Mr. Hutchins is the founder and President of Industrial Truck Safety, providing forklift safety training to private companies, community colleges, and government organizations.

Mr. Hutchins also serves as the Operations Manager of BedRock Electronic Security Technology (BEST) a division of EMCS, Inc guiding the convergence of Physical Security with Information Technology (I.T.) Services and Telecommunications Services offered by BEST and its sister company BedRock Services.