Safety Motivation and Promotion

Summary
How does a loss control management program sustain the high levels of employee motivation, commitment, and involvement that are necessary for it to achieve its goals? Safety motivation and promotion programs and activities have been the traditional answer, but modern research is causing many management and loss control professionals to rethink their strategies. This Data Sheet discusses this topic and offers tips on establishing programs that promote a loss control culture, encourage employee involvement, and help build long-term commitment.

Safety Cultures
Loss control management – (sometimes called Safety Management) – is that portion of a complete management system that deals with protecting and conserving the assets of businesses and organizations. For loss control programs to achieve their goals, safety professionals agree that sustained high levels of employee motivation, commitment, and involvement are essential. But how does an employer motivate employees for long-term safety success while promoting loss control programs in an effective manner?

Many traditional approaches have been less successful than anticipated, and a few of the old “carrot-and-stick” standards are now perceived as actually counter-productive. Most safety and management professionals are looking for ways to go beyond gimmicky campaigns and prizes for safety. They want to build loss control cultures where safety is so deeply ingrained in an organization that it is simply “the way things are done around here”.

To move loss control management in that direction a number of very important questions need to be answered. Must employers constantly devise new methods to keep employees interested and motivated with respect to safety? Do employees need constant novelty and incentives to stay committed to safety as a way to preserve their own well-being? How do you promote a loss control program without compromising its values? How do you build a “culture”? What approach options are available to take the LC management program to where it needs to go?

Motivation and Promotion
Research on thousands of people - people in a variety of work environments, performing different tasks, and at different levels of responsibility - has found remarkable consistency in what motivates – and equally important - what “de-motivates” workers in terms of long-term commitment, and involvement. This research supports the idea that many traditional loss control approaches to motivation and promotion were less effective because they either put-the-cart-before-the-horse or tilted-at-the-wrong-windmill.

These studies identified powerful work-related motivators. Many are consistent with the traditional employee motivating factors: self-preservation, personal or material gain, loyalty, responsibility, pride, conformity, rivalry, leadership, logic, and humanity. The strongest, in terms of generating long-term commitment, are associated with personal growth, and can be classified under the general headings of achievement, recognition, and job enrichment. New knowledge and capabilities stimulates and cultivates motivation, especially when combined with a work environment that allows for their expression and recognition.

The same studies consistently show that there is a powerful “flip-side” as well. Employees are demotivated by poor organizational factors in the work management system. What’s more, the influence of
organizational factors is far stronger than previously thought in affecting motivation, behavior and safety /loss control performance.

Many management theories that evolved in recent decades, including Total Quality Management, Statistical Process Control, Program Management, Behavioral Safety, and Process Safety Management stress that all types of performance – whether it involves safety, quality, or production – comes mainly from the system …or the lack of a system. They point out that individual motivation and performance can be enhanced, limited, or even defeated by the work system. In essence, these management theories and approaches say that focusing promotional efforts on individually motivating employees is the wrong target.

Since the best motivation can be defeated by a poor work management system, emphasis needs to be placed on improving the system itself. This does not mean, as some safety professionals have argued, that motivation and promotion activities and programs are irrelevant. It means that there is a priority involved in establishing those activities and programs. Before safety professionals start focusing on safety campaigns and “appropriate incentives” to increase employee motivation and involvement, they should take a hard look at the overall management system that is in place for an organization and evaluate how the loss control program interacts with that system.

The management system must support and positively reinforce the activities, behaviors, and /or performance that the LC program is trying to promote, or the effort fails.

Tips for a Successful Motivation and Promotion Program
• Start with the management system - Improve the Process! - The aim of motivation and promotion programs is sustained performance sufficient to achieve desired goals. Be sure that the overall and LC management programs are compatible. That LC programs are: supported by top management, that responsibilities are clearly understood, that authority and resources are adequate for those responsibilities, and that employees are able to engage become actively involved with the LC programs and processes in a meaningful way.
• Stress a management approach – Engage all employees in the safety process. Provide for and encourage their involvement. Not every employee will be fully engaged or motivated, but that is not necessary. Fully engaging even a small group of employees can have a tremendous, positive impact on overall LC culture.
• Eliminate inconsistencies” – The loss control message must be consistent with the facts. There must be no contradictions between the values of the program and what is valued in the administration of the program. Displaying “Safety First” signs throughout a facility where production obviously has top priority is a powerful de-motivator. If safety is important, it should be treated as important at all levels of the organization. If employee involvement is valued, then employee input should be considered in decision-making.
• Goals should be clearly identified and agreed upon – They should be communicated and committed to by all parties in the organization. They must be consistent with both corporate and loss control management programs. Management and employees should jointly agree on specific safety performance and how it will be measured. The safety performance should be quantifiable and verifiable. Program goals should be consistent with the organization’s business philosophy and safety culture.
• Motivation is based on good human relations - not psychological manipulation or devious schemes and gimmicks. People want to be managed by principles, not be endless rules and regulations.
• Treat all personnel – and their input - as important – Take interest in the welfare of all associates.

Safety is a cooperative effort of high importance that affects all levels of an organization.
• Discipline is not a motivational tool - Emphasis on disciplinary actions as a motivational tool can have long-lasting, mostly negative effects. This does not mean that discipline has no place in the LC program or the process of culture building. Disciplinary action is a necessary function, but it should not be perceived

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as biased, unfair or random. An inconsistent disciplinary policy would be a powerful de-motivator for employees.

- **Safety incentive award programs are controversial in LC circles** - One reason is that they tend to shift emphasis away from “Safety as a Value”; some say it “cheapens” it. Research on the widespread use of incentives award programs has identified them as significant contributors to the declining *effectiveness interval* of loss control motivational programs. [This interval is the time between launches of safety promotions needed to maintain employee interest and involvement.] There are also concerns about distorted LC feedback (under-reporting of losses), rewarding the wrong set of behaviors, and creating attitudes and perceptions contrary to LC management objectives. Most damaging of these is the entitlement mindset that employees should expect – even demand – something every time they are asked to participate in a safety program. This jaded attitude is a serious problem.

Supporters of these programs argue that incentives produce measurable results, and that the problems reported are the result of poorly designed and administered programs. Perhaps, but the consensus is that the motivation and involvement is temporary, the behavioral changes are transient, and on the whole the use of incentive awards creates more problems than they solve.

- **Safety campaigns are never a substitute for good job/workplace design or engineering controls.**

**Summary**

The goals and objectives of motivation and promotion programs and activities should include:

1. Encourage and support safe, productive working behaviors, habits, and positive attitudes toward loss prevention.
2. Create safety awareness and develop hazard recognition skills and behaviors on loss control/safety-related issues and concerns throughout the organization.
3. Build long-term employee commitment to loss control throughout the organization.
4. Promote a “safety culture” that emphasizes cooperative efforts among all levels of an organization.
5. Recognize and encourage loss control behaviors and practices by employees and managers that effectively reduce frequency and severity of all forms of accidental loss and contribute to the organization’s safety culture and work environment.
6. Should begin with a focus on creating an effective fusion of the overall and LC management systems. LC management systems are only as good as they are administered. If the system is flawed and does not change, employee interest and motivation alone cannot make a difference. LC management systems require planning, coaching, good communication and ongoing support from top management and employees, and must engage all employees in the safety process.

Key questions need to be asked - and answered – when deciding whether to implement a motivation and promotion program that uses campaigns, awards, and other incentives:

- Is the program sending a message that safety is valued? (Or is it trivialized?)
- Are the right behaviors being encouraged?
- Will the activities generate the right feedback about the performance?
- Does it contribute to a strong safety culture?
- Does it really motivate employees or does it contribute to organizational safety cynicism?

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