



# Leadership skills to create a strong jobsite safety climate

## The Challenge

A strong jobsite safety climate is critical for improving safety performance and safety outcomes in the construction industry. The way foremen and other frontline leaders interact with their crews and set expectations about safety and health can either strengthen or weaken that climate. Unfortunately, workers promoted to supervisory positions because of their technical abilities may not have the skills needed to be effective safety leaders. Many of these new supervisors may be asked to take the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 30-hour training course to learn more about safety hazard identification, avoidance, control, and prevention; however, the course did not cover safety leadership skills. While some larger companies and building trades unions supplemented the 30-hour with additional leadership training, the reach of these programs was limited because the majority of construction companies have fewer than 10 employees and their employees tend not to be represented by a union.

## The Response

To help fill this skill and training gap, CPWR's Director of Research and Evaluation, researchers from the University of Colorado, construction industry representatives, academic and instructional design subject matter experts, and OSHA staff partnered to develop a leadership training module that could be incorporated into the OSHA 30-hour course as an elective or taught as a stand-alone course.

## The Results

FIVE CRITICAL SAFETY LEADERSHIP SKILLS				
01	02	03	04	05
<p><b>LEADS BY EXAMPLE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishes safety expectations as a core value</li> <li>Shares safety vision with team members</li> <li>Demonstrates a positive attitude about safety</li> <li>'Walks the Talk'</li> </ul>	<p><b>ENGAGES AND EMPOWERS TEAM MEMBERS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engages, encourages, and empowers crew members to identify and act upon unsafe situations by...                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reporting hazards and safety concerns</li> <li>Providing solutions</li> <li>Reporting near misses</li> <li>Stopping work if necessary</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>ACTIVELY LISTENS AND PRACTICES 3-WAY COMMUNICATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actively listens to <b>hear</b> what team members are saying</li> <li>Practices 3-way communication by having a person repeat the message they heard</li> </ul>	<p><b>DEVELOPS TEAM MEMBERS THROUGH TEACHING, COACHING, AND FEEDBACK</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respectfully teaches and coaches workers</li> <li>Watches the learner fix the hazardous situation or perform the task to make sure it's done correctly</li> <li>Focuses on potential consequences rather than on the team member</li> <li>Uses the FIST principle: Facts, Impact, Suggestions, Timely</li> </ul>	<p><b>RECOGNIZES TEAM MEMBERS FOR A JOB WELL DONE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Privately and/or publicly acknowledges team members for going above and beyond for safety</li> </ul>

The final 2.5 hour Foundations for Safety Leadership (FSL) training module was completed in early 2016 and incorporated into the OSHA 30-hour as an elective January 1, 2017. The training is called the 'Foundations for Safety Leadership (or FSL)' because it provides students with foundational information about safety leadership and five critical leadership skills illustrated here. In Section 1, students learn about and discuss the direct and indirect costs of ineffective safety leadership, the benefits of effective safety leadership, and how safety leaders strengthen jobsite safety climate. They learn the FSL definition of a safety leader, which is: *A*

*person who has the courage to demonstrate that s/he values safety by working and communicating with team members to identify and limit hazardous situations even in the presence of other job pressures such as scheduling and costs, and are introduced to the five leadership skills the partners identified as being most critical for frontline leaders to practice on the jobsite. In Section 2, instructors can use multiple teaching modes to give students the opportunity to apply the Section 1 foundation material by working through, discussing and learning from real-world construction jobsite scenarios. Each scenario shows foremen, superintendents, workers, and company owners using, or not using, the five leadership skills within the context of a safety and health situation.*

# The CPWR IMPACT

Between 2014 and 2016, the group worked together to develop, pilot, and evaluate the FSL. Findings from a year-long evaluation showed that two and four weeks after participating in the FSL training, leaders reported an increased understanding of the safety leadership skills and improved use of the skills and safety practices. OSHA’s decision to incorporate the FSL into the 30-hour course as an elective raised the industry’s awareness and use of the training. By 2019, more than 70,000 leaders had participated in the FSL as part of an OSHA 30-hour training or a stand-alone course provided by a company or union. Here are just two examples of the type of feedback received:

*“By using the 5 FSL leadership skills, in particular [to] engage and empower team members and [develop] team members through teaching, coaching, and feedback, young professionals will be able to see benefits of effective safety leadership in terms of improving their communication, listening, and leadership skills, which they can use to enhance the safety culture of our industry.”*

— Safety Director, Dimeo Construction

*“It is a great training program. We continue to work to find ways to embed the skills. Our two main ways are: 1. We send out a weekly text to all foreman with a helpful reminder that changes weekly; [and] 2. We send out a Toolbox Talk specific to our company that we’ve written every 2 weeks to engage our team.”*

— Executive VP & COO, Bruce & Merrilees Electric Co.



Dimeo Site Safety Manager Justin Griffith teaches project crew leaders about safety leadership with the FSL.

## What made it a success?

The Foundations for Safety Leadership (FSL) program fills an identified need for construction frontline leaders to learn about critical safety leadership skills that they can put into practice on a daily basis to strengthen the safety climate of their jobsites. Factors that contributed to the program’s positive outcome include:

- Involving end-users, including safety and health professionals from small and large construction companies, OSHA 30-hour authorized trainers, and other subject matter experts, in developing and evaluating a training program designed specifically for the construction industry.
- Collaborating with instructional design experts to create a module that is easy for trainers to learn and gives them the flexibility of using a variety of teaching modes to engage their students.
- Having OSHA participate in the development of the FSL and their agreement to incorporate it as an elective in their 30-hour course. As an OSHA 30-hour elective, the FSL has the potential to reach over 100,000 workers annually. If the numbers reached after only two years –more than 70,000 trained– is an indication of future reach, the FSL is well on its way to having a positive impact on strengthening construction jobsite safety climate and improving safety outcomes.