

Aligning and Integrating Safety as a Value

Construction management, in partnership with their employees, is responsible for ensuring that jobsite hazards are eliminated, or at least minimized. These partnerships are most effective when they exist within a positive safety climate.

The **safety climate** on a construction jobsite refers to managements' and employees' shared perceptions about the extent to which safety is rewarded, expected, valued and reinforced. It may be influenced by things such as project scheduling and planning methods and norms of the trades working on-site.

Safety must be integrated into all company activities to ensure it is valued as much as all other business functions. This occurs when management clearly and consistently communicates safety expectations. Truly valuing safety means it is never compromised for productivity. Which of the following best describes your company?

INATTENTIVE	→ REACTIVE	→ COMPLIANT	→ PROACTIVE	→ EXEMPLARY
<p>Safety is a cost; a necessary evil. Safety is not integrated in policies or procedures; the primary focus is on productivity. There is little or no budget for safety. The belief is that construction is inherently dangerous and nothing can be done to change it. Accidents are human error and are punished.</p>	<p>Safety is inconsistently communicated as a priority. When a project falls behind schedule, production becomes valued more than safety. Safety is not valued or enforced when work is conducted on varying shifts or on weekends because no one is watching or cares. Safety policies are not reviewed routinely for consistency or relevancy.</p>	<p>The OSHA requirements are the safety program. Safety indicators focus solely on injuries, illnesses, and accidents. Safety meetings are conducted only when required.</p>	<p>Safety is included in bids. Subcontractor selection is based on safety performance. Safety is not compromised for productivity. Prevention through Design is often used to reduce hazards. Routine inspections are completed when items are tracked to abatement.</p>	<p>Safety is formally integrated into policies and procedures; communicated clearly and consistently to everyone. All meetings include safety. Safety is never compromised for productivity. Regular communication reinforces the culture of safety as a value. Leading indicators are measured and used to improve the safety climate on jobsites. Prevention through Design is used to reduce injuries and exposures.</p>

How to become exemplary

Review the ideas below and check the short-term  (1-2 months), mid-term , or long-term  (1-2 years) circle to indicate which you will commit to adopt and by when. Congratulations, if you've already adopted the idea!

Idea #1 - Integrate safety expectations into policies, procedures, and guidelines to ensure they are aligned with other company priorities

While safety may not be relevant to all policies and procedures, incorporating and integrating appropriate safety language into those that are shows employees that the company values safety and more importantly values them. Of course just writing it down does not make it happen. Adequate resources are necessary so safety policies and procedures are implemented properly to show that employee safety really is the primary value.

-  — Already Adopted
-  — Short-term
-  — Mid-term
-  — Long-term

Idea #2 - Bring together people from different groups to discuss project related safety strategies

A positive safety climate thrives when employees in different groups (within or across disciplines or functions) have the opportunity to communicate about project-specific safety issues. For example, architects, engineers, construction workers, subcontractor managers, and even human resource employees have different perspectives on project-related safety and strategies for managing them. By encouraging everyone to discuss safety during project planning and execution, relationships are built, mutual trust is established, and safety becomes integrated and valued by all.

-  — Already Adopted
-  — Short-term
-  — Mid-term
-  — Long-term

Idea #3 - Reinforce safety through on-going training

Provide resources to ensure that supervisors and workers receive the training needed to work safely and understand that they are also responsible for a safe jobsite. Supervisor training should focus on the hazard identification, leadership, and communication skills needed to create and sustain a positive jobsite safety climate and emphasize that safety cannot be compromised. Employee training should equip them to proactively identify and report safety hazards. Companies should give employees stop work authority for serious or imminent dangers.

-  Already Adopted
-  Short-term
-  Mid-term
-  Long-term

Idea #4 - Ensure safety is discussed at all regularly scheduled meetings

Safety should be the focal point at all jobsites' weekly and daily planning meetings. Consider starting the meetings with a "safety minute." Train supervisors to carry out safety-focused discussions with employees throughout the day about potential hazards and any close calls/good catches they may have observed. When hazards are identified they should be promptly addressed and employees should be notified of how the hazard has been or is being mitigated.

-  Already Adopted
-  Short-term
-  Mid-term
-  Long-term

Idea #5 - Periodically assess if the company's expressed safety-related values are aligned with other values such as productivity and reducing cost

Gathering quantitative (surveys, audits) or qualitative (informal interviews, focus groups) data from workers and supervisors can help detect gaps between what a company says about safety and what employees perceive. The information can reveal where changes may be needed. Data should also be collected after changes are made to determine if the gap has narrowed. Questions used to collect this data can assess the degree to which:

-  Already Adopted
-  Short-term
-  Mid-term
-  Long-term

- employees share a proactive vision of safety;
- safety goals are understood;
- accountability is equal and applied evenly at all levels;
- management demonstrates commitment to employee safety and health;
- roles and responsibilities for implementing safety are defined and understood;
- employees are part of the safety process;
- safety is valued equal to or greater than production;
- employees feel empowered to stop work if they identify a hazardous situation;
- principles of Prevention through Design (PtD) are embraced; and
- safety is integrated into planning and part of everything the company does.