

Building Safety Cultures That Work: Engaging Employees in Safety Reporting

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An illustration showing several stylized human figures interacting with large, colorful puzzle pieces. One figure is climbing a stack of pieces, another is holding a piece high, and others are standing on or near the pieces. The background is a light blue gradient.

Benefits of Engagement

- Positive employee participation
- Proactive employee input
- Employee coaching and caring
- Voluntary corrective actions
- Reduced incidents and claims
- Reduced WC costs



Failures Often Appear in Emergencies: Midtown Tunnel Norfolk-Portsmouth

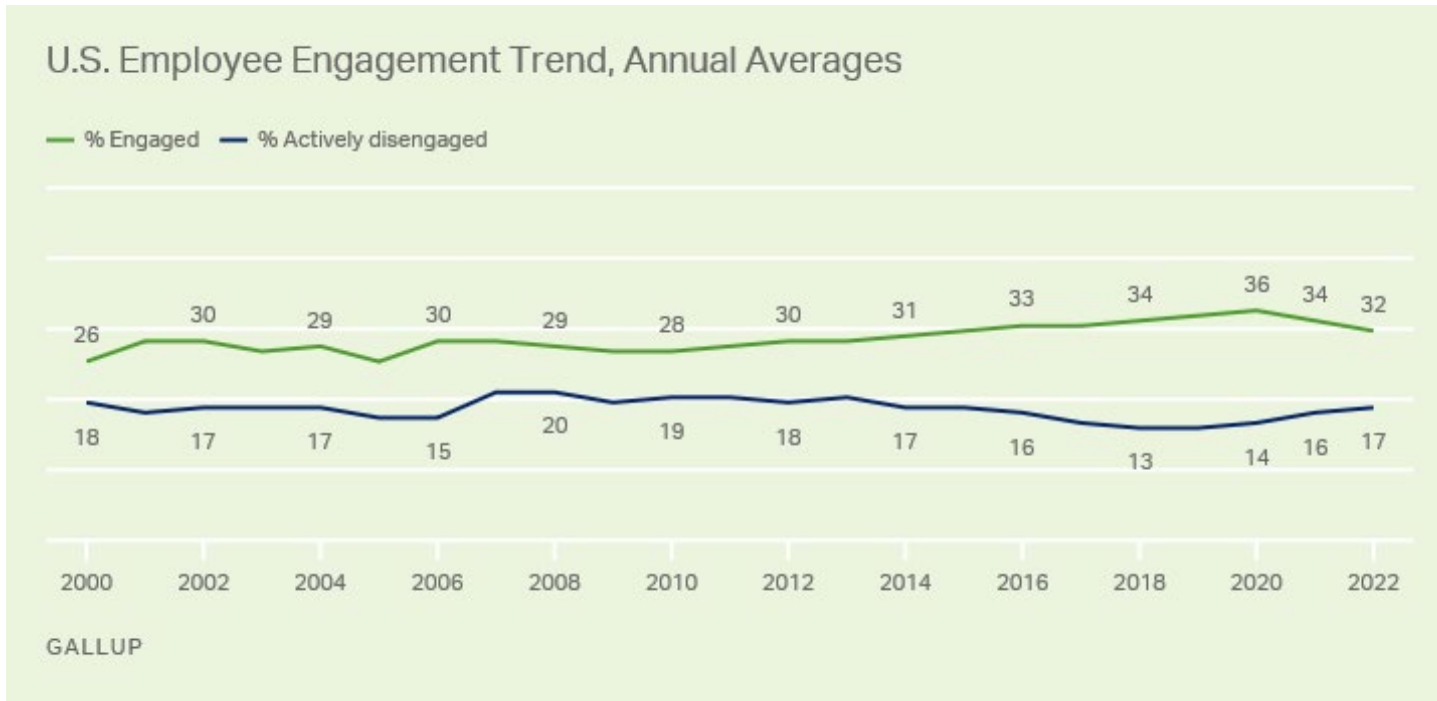
- Isabell Hurricane in 2003
- Unexpected Storm Surge
- Water reached tunnel entrance
- Flood gate inoperable
- Water flooded tunnel



How could this have happened?

- **Never possible?**
- **No emergency maintenance drills?**
- **Lack of regular ongoing inspections and/or maintenance?**
- **Questions as to why the gate was welded open instead of repaired**
- **Identified communication deficiencies in the supervisor-employee planning and maintenance**

Employee Engagement Perceptions v Reality



- 91% of today's workforce want to know if their employer as their best interest (State of Employee Safety Report 2022)
- 70% of employees have less workplace incidents when they feel engaged (Gallup)
- Management believes 81% of their employees are engaged (Rand)
- Reality is that only 32% of employees are engaged in the workforce (Gallup)

Characteristics of Creating “Engaged” Employees



- Company promoted culture of trusting employees
- Positive reinforcement of proactive employee action
- Positive work culture and belonging
- Caring for colleagues – cupcakes, picnics and sharing of milestones
- Effective teamwork in emergency situations
- “All for one and one for all”

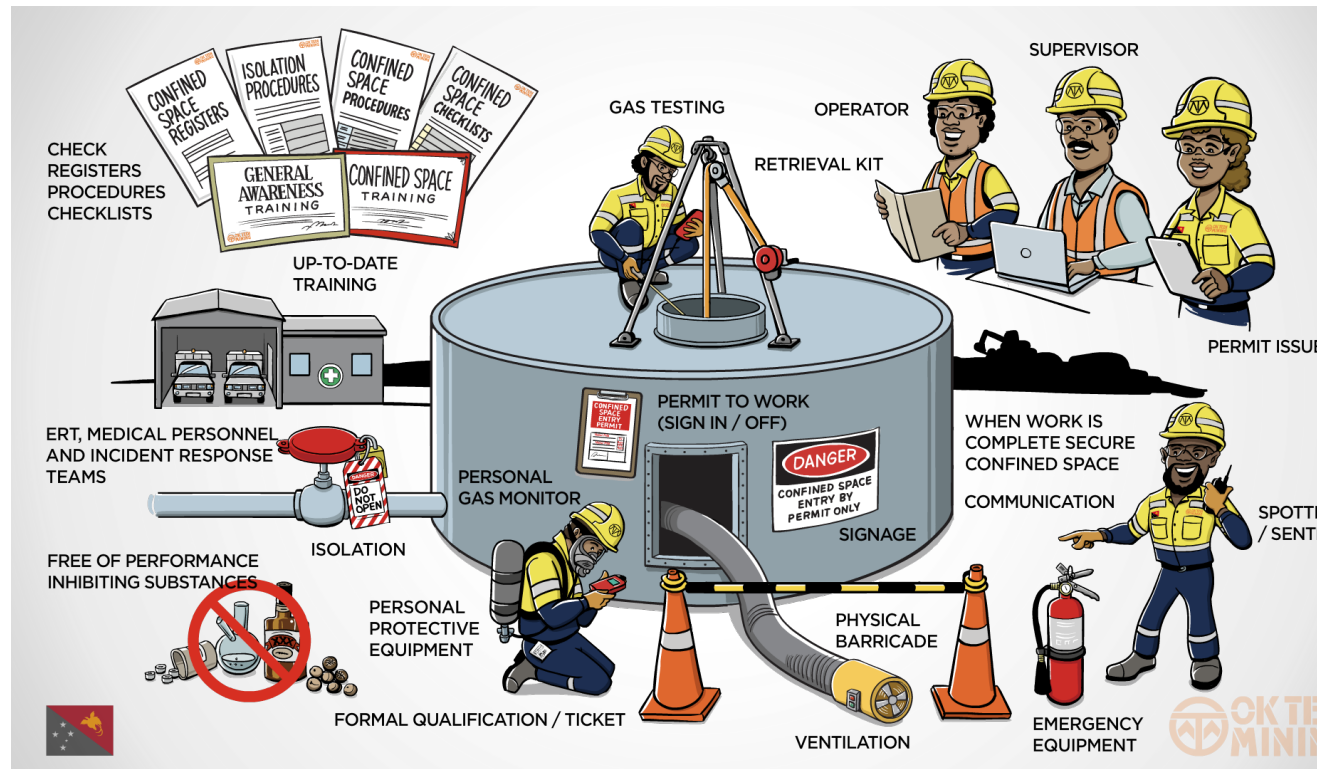
Foundations of Engagement



EMPLOYEE
ENGAGEMENT
STRATEGIES

- Pride in partnership
- Clear expectations
- Consistent communication
- Growth learning
- Measurable success and reward structures
- Proactive interactions asking for employee feedback
- Top-down culture

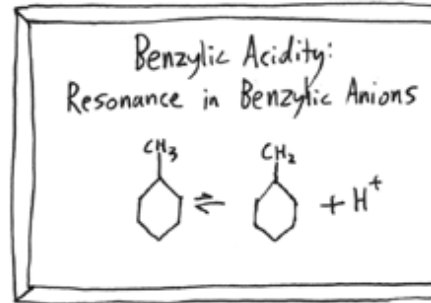
Importance of Clear Expectations



- Set clear and concise policies and protocols
- Seek input from employees
- Gear training to employee aptitudes and comprehension
- Match safety drills with employee training
- Practice emergency protocols

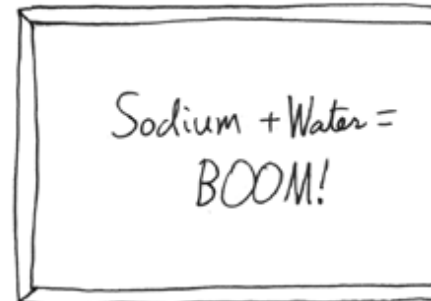
CHEMISTRY FOR CHEMICAL ENGINEERS:

...THIS IS BECAUSE
THE ANION IS STABILIZED
BY RESONANCE, SO YOU
CAN PUT THE NEGATIVE
CHARGE...



CHEMISTRY FOR ELECTRICAL ENGINEERS:

TODAY WE'RE
GOING TO
BURN THINGS!



Communications

- Target education and training to your audience
- Provide language translations as necessary
- Use generational tools for engagement
- 25% of employees overwhelmed
- “Devil is in the details” – provide necessary information
- Easy access to information via multiple media opportunities
- Be consistent in your approach
- Include the “why,” “what for,” and “how”

Growth Learning and Opportunity

- Build on positive interactions and relationships
- Create interactive safety training
- Provide time for online options
- Establish a Certificate Supervisor Program (NSC) with rewards
- Employer sponsored college credits

OSHA 10 HOUR





Measure Success

- Find a suitable comparable metric that is achievable
- Compare division and departments with reasonable metrics
- Establish achievable goals that are within the reach of your employees
- Assist in achievement through financial support and recognition of milestones achieved



Employee Feedback

- 86% of employees feel unheard (UKG survey)
- Construct achievable feedback integration into decision making
- Design participation surveys that are anonymous as necessary
- Discuss issues as they occur and obtain ground level feedback
- Question: Impact of manager's unsolicited bad decision?
- Measure management's response through corporate continuum

Build Top Down

- **Be an example for your peers and your subordinates**
- **Practice equality in leadership**
- **Promote an employee's best characteristics**
- **Engage employees in recognizing self improvement opportunities**
- **Differentiate an employee's best interest versus teamwork as an expectation**
- **Encourage employees to participate in planning and budgeting**
- **Safety first v cost?**



Quiet Quitting

['kwī-ət 'kwi-tɪŋ]

Doing the minimum requirements of one's job and putting in no more time, effort, or enthusiasm than absolutely necessary.

Today's Evolving Challenges

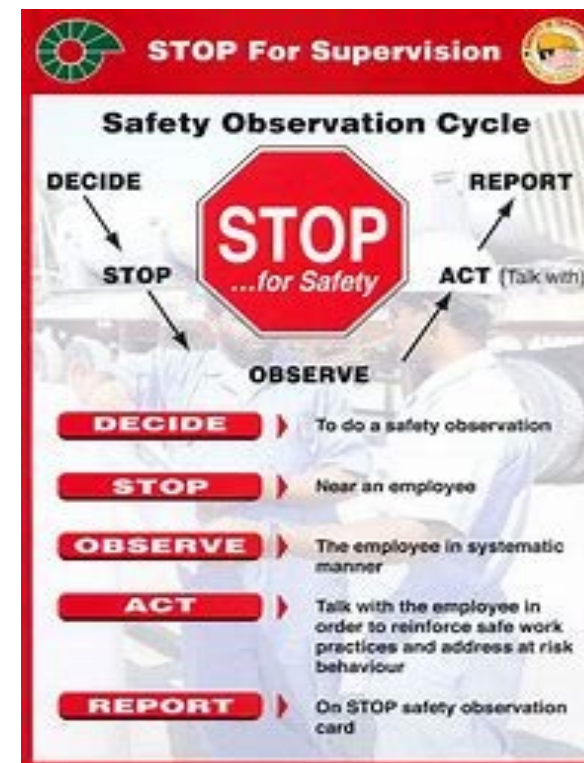
- Pandemic Isolation Impacts
- Workplace workforce changes - remote work, hybrid work and standard work
- Real estate economic pressures
- Unstable global economy
- Pressing socioeconomic issues
- Turbulent IT Sector Layoffs
- Changing employee satisfaction drivers and expectations
- Evolving social norms
- Quiet Quitting
- Live to work versus work to live

Develop the Safety Culture (Geller)

Actions:

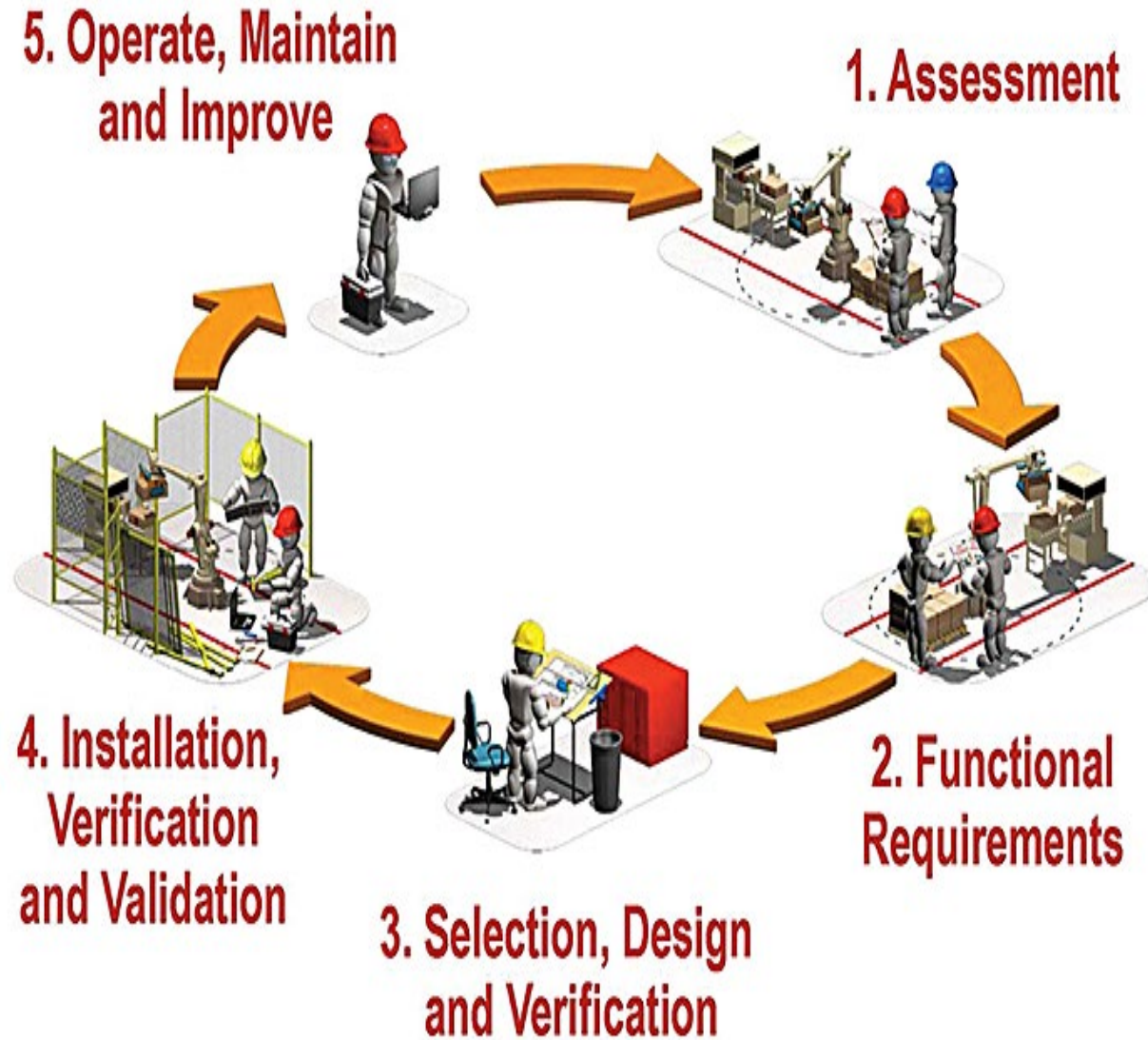
1. Promote positive actions
2. **Benefit from observing**
3. Behavior feedback
4. Supportive v Corrective
5. Embrace empathy
6. Customize consequences
7. Self actualization to transcendence

Observation Card



Develop your Safety Culture

—
Integrate risk management into your programming





Ground Up Risk Culture: Safety Personnel

- **Safety is everyone's business**
- **Learn the intricacies of workflow patterns and nuances**
- **Understand the challenges faced by employees in their workday**
- **Promote awareness of safety amidst potential management conflicts and expectations**
- **Be open to suggestions and criticism**
- **Be a problem solver not an excuse**
- **Focus on individual and team achievements**
- **Celebrate the small victories of teamwork**



Keys to Successful Worker Participation

- Tap into your employees hands-on working knowledge of operations
- Encourage employees to identify workplace hazards within their scope of employment
- Include employee observations and input into operational procedures and evaluations
- Test employee workplace knowledge to promote consistency in operations
- Encourage positive and negative employee feedback
- Establish OSHA Recommended Practices within your processes

Compile Employee Ideas

- Track
- Investigate
- Involve your team
- Provide a timely and thoughtful response
- Express gratitude
- Respect anonymity

~~49~~ 499 EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IDEAS

The Ultimate Cheat Sheet Your Team Will Love

Florida Water Plant Offline

- Major Florida City restricts water
- Rodent chewed through major power feed
- Switchgear failed
- Treatments went offline releasing untreated
- Community placed at risk
- Emergency measures instituted
- Politics of blame





Leadership Impact

- “Good leaders also create trust and credibility where people believe in what they are doing and in what the organization is doing.”

Louis J. Diberardinis, MS CIH, CPS,
Director of Health & Safety, MIT

Managers v Leaders

Managers are:

- **Transactional**
- **Budget driven**
- **Focused on production goals**
- **Task oriented**
- **Inherently self-motivated**
- **Singular in thought**
- **Self-promoting**

Leaders are:

- **Transformational**
- **Process driven**
- **Focused on inspiring confidence**
- **Vision oriented**
- **Inherently group motivated**
- **Collective thinkers**
- **Team promoting**

Soft skills

“ Soft skills are the combination of people skills, social skills, communication skills, emotional intelligence, and personality traits that make it easy to get along and work harmoniously with other people. ”



Team Work



Time Management



Conflict Management

Creative Thinking



Leadership Skills



LEADERSHIP

Influencing and empowering others and inspiring trust and confidence

- Listen
- Communicate
- Be Collegial
- Be empathetic
- Care
- Engage without judgement



Public Entity Safety Challenges

- **Multiple Leaders (dept heads)**
- **Resistance to change established norms**
- **Seniority before ingenuity**
- **Employee motivation challenges**
- **Collective bargaining pressures**

Public Entity Safety Culture Challenges

- **Dysfunctional political pressures**
- **Shrinking tax dollars**
- **Escalating healthcare costs**
- **Brain drain of retirement**
- **Mixed messages**
- **Quality of life societal changes**
- **Want versus need**
- **Ability to adapt**



Sources

Six Best Safety Engagement Ideas for Cultural Change for your organization

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Safety Engagement: How to engage employees with safety

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Recommended Practices for Safety and Health

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Culture of Safety: Five Ways to Encourage Safety in the Workplace

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How Increasing Employment Engagement Improves Environmental Health and Safety

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Are Your Employees Engaged in Work Place Safety

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Engaging Employees: Another Step in Improving Safety

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