

Changing a Safety Culture

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Over the past few year I have heard the statement said many times that we need to change the Safety Culture, we need to make the Safety programs at Plumas County stronger.

I have often thought how does a person or group of people go about changing a culture that has been going in the wrong direction and has not allowed or shown improvement. I know that changing a program or a culture in which we as employees operate is a difficult task.

This is always an on going project where you take a couple of steps forward and slide back one but you have to continually work at making that culture change every day. You will run into Cave People along the way these are - Citizens Against Virtually Everything, and they will be against any kind of change even if it makes their work place a safer place for them to work.

Here are a few ideas that we may use in making some of these changes:

- One thing that I have learned is that everyone likes to feel appreciated. People for the most part want to do a good job and they like to hear that confirmation from someone. I feel that sometimes we forget how to say thank you or I appreciate that you took the time to perform that job safely. We all too often look for the negative in our fellow employees and we are willing to bring that negative out so that everyone can hear it. We do not look for the positive when someone goes the extra step or makes the extra effort. You build a better team by finding the good in people and their intentions, instead of looking for the bad.
- Another thing that I have found that works is the ability to empower people to do a job and trust that it will be taken care of all the way to completion. We all too often ask someone to do something and then we hover over them to make sure it is done just how we want it done or we try to take it back. It is OK for someone other than us to have great ideas and it is OK to allow them to take the credit for those ideas.
- Safety crosses all boundaries. Safety and Safety rules apply to everyone not just a select few. Everyone should set an example for the person next to them. It has become increasingly more important that we look out for our fellow workers. We need to be willing to step in and say stop - let's make sure we are performing this task safely without the fear of repercussions. When employees look out for employees this is called **team work**.
- Communication is very important when trying to change a safety culture. Communication needs to flow both ways from management to the employee performing the job and from the employee to management. Employees performing the task know better then anyone else about the safety issues they face on a daily basis with the equipment that they run. When communication lines are opened and everyone has an equal opportunity for input into safety issues, the safety program will start to grow. All safety issues need to be followed up, and the loop needs to close with the person that originated the issue. When this happens it will start to increase the communication and team work. The goal is for the ownership of the safety program to come from everyone. There is no 'I' in safety - it is a team program.

A Safety Culture is a hard thing to change and it takes the whole team working towards one goal.