

SAFEGUARD

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Changing behaviour

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Upper prosecuted

ME research

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Accentuate the positive...

If you want to change the way your employees behave, focus on encouraging desirable behaviours rather than punishing undesirable ones, a behavioural scientist told *Site Safe's* Myth Busting safety conference in Auckland.

"Behaviour always has a purpose, and that purpose is found in the consequences," Dr Kyle McWilliams from *Corporate Learning* told delegates. "If the consequences are positive, the behaviour will increase – and unfortunately unsafe behaviour is often seen as having positive consequences because it is quicker and easier than doing things the safe way."

The solution, he said, was to find ways to make safety more rewarding than risk-taking.

"We are programmed to do things to conserve energy, but safe behaviour is often seen as negative because it slows us down.

"The best way to encourage it is to generate positive outcomes."

Generally safety managers focused on discouraging at-risk behaviour, McWilliams said, but this was much less effective. "If we encourage safe behaviour by providing positive outcomes, unsafe behaviour will reduce. The reverse doesn't happen if you just discourage unsafe practices, however."

McWilliams urged delegates to challenge accepted practices in their workplaces to ensure that they really were effective. Many widely accepted OHS ideas and practices were based on flawed logic, he said, going on to outline the faults with some of them:

- Safety is just common sense: "Common sense is knowledge gained from experience, but two people can have the same experience and interpret it differently. Scientific knowledge, on the other hand is universal. Common sense accepts the obvious; scientific knowledge challenges it."
- Safety should be the number one priority: "A priority shifts up and down the continuum. Safety should be a value, something that remains in place, regardless of the situation."
- Zero harm should be the goal: "What does it mean? Have you realised your goal if nobody gets hurt today? Or this week, this month, or this year? And once you've hit your goal you can only go backwards. If you have an injury you get a corporate message saying we all need to do better, but individuals have no control over this, no ability to influence anyone beyond themselves."
- High-stake external audits encourage safety participation: "A one-off snapshot doesn't have much to do with daily activity on site, but the results are extrapolated over sites and over time, without justification. The audit looks at lots of items – probably a couple of hundred of them – when you may have only between eight and 15 issues. But because you have to give attention to all 200 things, you can put only half a percent of your time and resources into addressing the real issues."
- Accident investigations are the best way to serve safety: "Investigations are often about blame. Instead do an accident analysis to look for common patterns. If something is happening on one site, you can almost guarantee it is happening elsewhere. Analysis is not about disciplining the person, but about changing the system by identifying and encouraging the behaviours you want."
- LTI boards are a great way to show safety data: "Celebrations and measures should reflect what is going on, not drive it. One company I worked with wanted to mark 365 days without an LTI by giving everyone really nice company jackets, but on day 331 somebody broke his ankle. Can you imagine how he felt? Later it came out that three previous accidents had been covered up, including one in which a guy had twisted his ankle in an almost identical incident. That was three learning opportunities lost, one of which might have prevented the eventual broken ankle."
- He's just accident prone – there's nothing I can do: "My colleague's husband is an electrician and home handyman. He has lots of accidents at home, but never at work. Why? Because of the consequences. At work goofing off is not tolerated, but at home he gets a bit of a laugh and some sympathy from his wife. He's accident prone because the consequences don't measure up. Make sure you are not misaligning consequences and behaviours."

McWilliams challenged delegates to shift their focus at work so they celebrated small successes and

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recognised good behaviour.

"On every work site there are lots of things going well and only a few fires, but the fires are what you pay attention to.

"If you shift your focus and start to pay attention to the good things, some of the problems will disappear by themselves."

WELLNESS: THE BUSINESS CASE

"The word 'wellness' makes me shift uncomfortably. It's wishy-washy – visions of people smiling. Conflict is what humans do."

Having grabbed the attention of delegates to *Safeguard's* recent OfficeSafe conference series, Dr *Grant Schofield* cited Australian research proving healthy staff are much more productive, but said that well-intentioned wellness programmes often failed to deliver expected outcomes.

Schofield, director of AUT's Centre for Physical Activity and Nutrition Research, outlined four traps companies often fell into when attempting staff wellness initiatives.

- Assuming information is enough. "Just telling people about stuff doesn't work. It's the information illusion."
- Online solutions. "The worried well might go there. The people who really need it won't."
- Exaggerating statistics to promote an initiative or its results.
- Fragmentation of efforts. "Get your initiatives lined up and you might not need any more resources."

Schofield cited a 2005 survey of 3620 Australian employees carried out by Medibank Private, in which participants answered a series of questions to measure their health and wellbeing status, and also questions relating to their number of days off work in the preceding four weeks, a self-evaluation of their overall performance at work, and their estimate of the number of effective hours they worked.

The results were striking. People with a health and wellbeing (HWP) score of 70 or above (out of 100) took two days sick leave a year, rated their performance as 8.5 out of 10, and estimated they worked 143 effective hours per month.

People with an HWP score of less than 30 took 18 days sick leave each year, rated their performance at only 3.7 out of 10, and worked only 49 effective hours a month.

Of the 3620 participants, 45% had an HWP score of less than 30 (regarded as unhealthy), and 26% scored 30 to 50. People scoring 70 or above were regarded as having good health and lifestyle habits.

Exercise: 10% were completely inactive, 40% engaged in only minimal exercise, and 12% engaged in less than one hour of physical activity each week.

Diet: 46% lived on high-fat diets, and only 8% ate five or more servings of fruit and vegetables daily.

Weight: 28% were obese and 34% overweight.

Stress: 53% reported feeling overwhelmed with stress and pressure a significant proportion of the time.

Behaviour: 56% were in the medium- to high-risk category in participating in risky behaviours such as smoking, drinking and irregular use of sunblock.

Sleep: 56% got less than seven hours sleep a night.

Medical conditions: 21% had experienced a medical condition in the three months preceding the survey. Back and neck pain (29%); hayfever (22%); heart disease (21%), migraines (14%), asthma (13%), depression (12%).

The productivity case for taking steps to boost employee health is clear, said Schofield, who recommended spending 50% of wellness effort in interacting with people, 30% in getting support from management – including resourcing and modelling behaviours – and 20% of effort in engaging with and educating people.

STOICAL IN THE FACE OF STRESS

It is not often that we have the opportunity to present the views of the classical Hellenistic school of philosophy known as the Stoics, whose expertise in health and safety (if any) has not been handed down from antiquity.

However, during her OfficeSafe presentation on workplace stress, speaker Dr *Hillary Bennett* suggested it was not the work demands placed on us in themselves which trigger a stress response, but our personal interpretation of what that demand means.

Despite our reporter's lamentable lack of a classical education, he somehow knew this wisdom was of ancient and honourable origin. "Epictetus!" he was observed to cry, to the mild consternation of nearby delegates.

A quick check with the classicist's friend – Wikipedia – showed that our chum Epictetus, who died AD135, was indeed a Stoic philosopher who is remembered chiefly for this epigram: "We are disturbed not by events, but by the views which we take of them."

Stoicism being a quality often required by health and safety practitioners, we think Epictetus got it just right. (Next issue's philosopher: Pythagoras.)

SAFETY BY DESIGN

Safe design means more than developing products or processes that are safe for their intended purposes, delegates to the *Electricity Engineers' Association's* 2007 safety workshop in Christchurch last month were told.

Opening the workshop, on the theme of safety by design, *Bob Taylor*, CEO of Christchurch-based contracting company *Cometics*, said the design stage should be used to ensure equipment and systems would remain safe at every stage of the life cycle, from assembly to ultimate disposal.

"Hazard identification and risk assessment have to be

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