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Welcome to Safety Culture Excellence. Today's topic: Knowledge of Precautions and Successes. My name is Shawn Galloway, and I'm proud to be your host.

Greetings from Saginaw, Michigan. Today, I begin a six-part series titled, "Safety Process Communication Loop." Communication is one of the most important elements in creating and sustaining excellent safety cultures. It must be timely, on target and clear. Otherwise, communication doesn't happen. In this series, we'll discuss effective channels of communication and how to ensure that people are hearing the message you mean to send. I hope you enjoy it. Here we go.

"To communication – having a sender and a receiver. Both have to be turned on and tuned in. If you're not tuned in to what I'm talking about, then communication isn't really happening. Peter Drucker once said that communication isn't just muttering. What I'm doing, essentially, is just muttering, if what I'm saying to you doesn't make sense. Communication actually happens on the recipient's end. You, as the receiver of what I'm talking – what I'm trying to project this message to – that's where the communication actually happens. If you have some questions, I then become the one who's communicated to.

"I want to make sure that I can do whatever I can to paraphrase back and make sure that I understand what the message is that's being received on this end. Let's put all this in the big picture of what we're trying to actually do here. All of us put together some sort of approach to improve safety out here. What we're trying to accomplish is keeping people safe, regardless of where they are. But safety, again, can't just be defined as 'not having an accident'. Safety has to have that positive definition. What we're doing in safety has to be so impactful that it helps people improve their safety day after day.

"It's not just a matter of going home with the ten and ten that you came in with – the ten fingers and the ten toes. Safety has to be defined as we give people more strategies every day that helps them be safe, regardless of where they are. When you have an approach, whether you call it behavior-based safety, observation-based safety, if you're focusing on the critical precautions. Communication is so important here because the things that we tend to focus on are a little bit different than what we generally do in safety. The things that we focus on have the opportunity of helping people, regardless of where they are in this world.

"That's the beauty of what we try to accomplish here, when we look at the discretionary precautions that are just good ideas - as Terry mentioned, looking both ways before you cross the street. Those are just good ideas that help you out where you're crossing a fork truck path or whether you're outside playing in the yard. They're just good ideas, and the more you can communicate, and the more you can look at the effectiveness and improve that within your communication, the better you're gonna be in safety. Because, again, the goal is to help people be safe regardless of where they are.

"So, the strategies that we provide people, we want them to help them, whether they're at work, whether they're driving back and forth to work, or whether at home. From an accidental fatality – you're ten times more likely to have an accidental fatality away from the job than you are on the job – ten times more likely. Now, you talk about accidental injuries – hundreds of times more likely. There's millions of accidental emergency room visits every year. The majority of them certainly do not come from the industrial work place. They come from just our exposure to everyday risk.

"So, the things that we focus on – the hypercritical things – we have to really make sure that we're communicating and we can't just say that we sent a message out there and call that communication. We have to judge and say, 'How effective was that communication?' So, what we try to do is we put a process together; we put some sort of approach in safety to help focus on worker safety. Now, management's goal, of course, is to create the safest workplace, and they should continue to improve that.

"What we try to do, in this approach, is we try to put a group of workers together – whether, at your site, it's workers and management – some sort of collaborative team – some sites it's worker only because that would be the best way. Whatever you have, whatever type of approach, you put these folks together and you give them the big picture. We've done studies, and a couple of years ago, we got the results from one.

"We asked groups of workers all over the place how many accidents can you remember all of the details about that were communicated to you – not the names or anything like that, but enough of the details that would help you in your decision in safety, or help you minimize your own exposure to the risk? The average response that we got wasn't 15, wasn't 10. The average response was three. The average employee out there – the average worker in an industrial setting – can only remember three accidents to where they have enough of the information about, and we're talking about sites that have a lot more than three accidents over the past few years.

"The average worker only understands the big picture of about three incidents. That's enough information to help them in their personal safety awareness, so we have to look at it and say how do we better communicate to folks out there – increase that awareness to where they have the big picture information? So, the first step that we try to do is we have a group at a site, and we give them the big picture. We give them all the information.

"They analyzed all of this and they developed some sort of checklist. Whether it's a long checklist or a focused checklist, they developed something that they believe are the critical things to communicate to people – the most important precautions. And they develop a communication strategy that involves some sort of observations. They go out there and develop. Now, whether it's a coaching, whether it's supervisors doing this, whether it's employees coaching one another – even supervisors focusing on coaching for compliance, rather than just managing for compliance, there's a difference in coaching than just trying to direct compliance out there.

"But regardless of it, you set up some sort of strategy to coach for a performance, and you set up something. You look for what encourages risk in an organization, something that we define as organizational tendencies, whether somebody doesn't perceive the risk accurately because they don't have all the big picture. Again, if the average person only remembers three incidents enough of the details, their perception's gonna be a little bit skewed from the folks that have seen all the data, have looked at the big picture. So, they go out there and say, 'Is it a perception issue? Are we doing something that's not effective in our training to change the perceptions? Is the communication not effective enough to change the perceptions? Are they just maybe not in the habit of it?'

"When we're trying to encourage specific precautions: a lot of times people just aren't in the habit of making sure they look behind them before they start backing up equipment. That's something we see all the time. At most of the facilities that I've worked at, I've seen fork trucks – at the locations that I've

worked at, the folks here in the room – I've seen fork trucks backing up equipment and moving stuff around. Luckily, there wasn't anybody behind them.

"But a lot of times, we're just not in that habit because we don't recognize it's a good idea. There's also obstacles and barriers. Obstacles make it difficult; barriers make it impossible. If there's an organizational tendency that encourages risk-taking, that encourages shortcuts, we need to identify that before the accident happens. Because once the accident happens, we should respond to that. We need to communicate those details. But, as you guys know, once an accident happens, it's way too late to prevent that one particular accident. So, we have to be looking for what encourages organizational risk-taking.

"A lot of times, people don't even realize they're exposing themselves to risk. And, if you're not aware of it, if something has such a low probability of turning into an incident, that flies under the radar of common sense and experience. People don't recognize low-probability risks. So, we go out there and say, 'Is it possible to take these precautions on this checklist?' That's the first part of communication. We have to look and talk to people and say, 'Is it possible to take these precautions?' If it is, we want to positively reinforce them; and, if not, we want to gather some insight to understand why.

"So, the communication starts happening. We gather some insight. This has to go back into some sort of database, it has to go into something; at minimum, an Excel spreadsheet. There's certainly a lot of other tools out there. There's a lot of software that you can buy. Many companies are building their own. You have to have something, to where you can look at this on a monthly basis and say, 'What's the most important thing to communicate out to the folks? What are the things that we really need to stay on message about?' And that has to come back to the team, and you don't want these teams to be spending their hours every month – or hour every month – just trying to sit there and slice and dice the data.

"We have to give the information to the folks in a quick enough manner to where they can effectively develop action plans, to respond and communicate those action plans to the folks. So, we look at it and we say, 'We've got a process in place. We've put a team together. We've put a checklist together. We have some observers going out there and doing some stuff, and it's funneling into a database and comes back to the team.' And we look at it and say, 'Well, how do we communicate to the entire work force? We've audited every type of behavior-based safety process that's out there – we've audited behind.'

"That's one of the unique characteristics about our company, which gives us an advantage - because we know what everybody else is doing, so it helps us with the organizations. When we're auditing those sites, we ask two specific questions to try to determine the effectiveness of the communication. The first question is this: 'How many people at your site can immediately rattle off the things you're focusing on?' If you have five things on your checklist – ten things on your checklist – how many of them can immediately tell you what those items are? We call that a knowledge of precautions.

"A lot of sites we go to, the average worker out there doesn't know – can't immediately rattle off. So we'll talk about ways to measure the knowledge of precautions. It's something that Terry and I started doing about a year and a half ago with the sites that we're working with, depending on where they are in the process. And we're gonna make that recommendation to everybody here. You've got to look out there and say, 'What's the effectiveness of our process? If we're communicating something to the entire population there, how good are we at communicating? How effective is it'

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"The other question that we ask people is: 'How many people can immediately point to a success the process has had?' If you've been successful at this, if you're involved for a year – even six months – six months into it, you should be identifying action plans that have measurable value. Now, statistically speaking, you're not gonna see the change until a couple of years because the first year is essentially Hawthorne effect. So, you can't really measure it and say it's statistically valid results until you're about three years into it, but you should see results. You should see in the first 90 days. You should be developing action plans to communicate out to the folks.

"But when you go out there, and we look at it and we say, 'How many people know the average? How many of the average folks out there can tell you the precautions immediately? And how many of them can immediately point to a success the process has had?' Unfortunately, the numbers are really low. So, how can we expect this process to be successful, or viewed as successful, if the average people don't know what we're focusing on and don't know the successes we've had?"

This concludes this week's podcast. Tune in for next week's title: "Staying on Message and Forgotten Communication."

Until next time, remember: "In safety, prevention trumps reaction." For more information on Safety Culture Excellence, or if you have a topic to suggest, please email us at podcast@proactsafety.com.