Stop Being Frustrated & Overcharged:
The Most Productive Way is the Safest Way
(One in a series on how to slash your workers' compensation costs)

When Alcoa's then new CEO, Paul O'Neill, was about to step in as CEO, the "experts" were anticipating expansion. However, O'Neil's first act when he took over the reins of Alcoa was to overhaul their safety program. Their program was already excellent, better than the industry average. Yet he believed it could be better. He understood that safety touches every employee in the organization, top to bottom, no matter what position they are in. This is where he wanted to start to change the culture of the organization; to make it a better-performing organization. He made safety everyone's responsibility, not just the loss control people on staff. Alcoa's productivity soared and injuries were dramatically reduced proving safety and productivity can work in harmony and, in fact, safer practices *can* lead to *better* production and profit.

Changing the culture and implementing a robust behavior-based safety program is a marathon, not a sprint. This is not something you are going to introduce in one meeting and everything is gall set. It is going to take time.

So you ask: "What do we need to do to establish and maintain a behavior-based safety system?" Here is a general outline.

1 – The Mission Statement.
Senior leadership, owners and executives must be involved. This must be communicated downwards through the organization and must be delivered with a sense of the priority being safety over just productivity. Doing something safe does not mean doing something slow. But doing something too fast can certainly mean doing something unsafe. Ultimately, those that will be held accountable should be involved in setting deeper objectives so they understand what needs to be done.

2 – Benchmarking.
If you do not measure and record; you cannot determine if you are achieving improvement. Items you may want to record and benchmark might include OSHA recordables and DART rates (Days Away, Restricted Duty, or Transitional Duty), so you can compare them to other peer organizations. You should also include items such as near misses and observed unsafe actions that did not result in an injury or property damage, but were "near misses."

Keep in mind that OSHA recordables, DART and near misses should all have specific numeric goals established that reduce over time. This way you can determine the success of your program.

Senior management must track and measure various components to hold the supervisors accountable. Yes, even the executives of the organization must monitor those below them to establish the supervisor is doing his or her job. Nothing undoes a safety program quicker than a supervisor who is only focused on productivity with no regard for safety.

Establish a line of communication for feedback from bottom to top. In other words, if an employee feels their supervisor is ignoring a situation that has been brought to their attention, they must feel safe that they can go above their supervisor without fear of repercussions and know who they can go to in such a circumstance.

3 – Establishing accountability and a Peer Review Process.
This starts with the owners, executives or CEO reviewing senior management, senior management reviewing supervisory, and supervisory reviewing workers. There is also a peer review process. This process includes a co-worker, maybe acting as the safety person of the day, or simply a longer tenured employee in a work group who is responsible for observing the operations of their co-workers because a supervisor may not always be present or even fully aware of all the exposures associated with doing a job.

Basically, you must be able to create a checklist of unsafe behaviors and safe behaviors for supervisors and peer observers to use. Measuring and recording is the key to this process. You will need ongoing training for observers so they can learn from each other, as well from the outside. More importantly, as your team learns these items and actions, corrections must be recorded in the training manual. This allows training of observers company-wide as well as new observers who can be trained to monitor their co-workers.

4 – Responsibility.
In establishing organizational responsibility levels, please understand it is a two-way street up and down the organization. Those below must feel free to "go up the ladder," even several rungs, to ensure you address key issues and situations. All goals and actions should be result-oriented. Everything requires reporting and measuring otherwise it ends up meaningless and without consequences. All of this will end up improving behavior.

Subsets of the levels of accountability involve personal, team, and organizational accountability:

- *Personal*
  You must empower and make each employee responsible for their own actions.

- *Team*
  There is shared accountability for the performance of a work group or team through the use of peer review.

- *Organizational*
  There is internal accountability not only laterally up and down the chain, but also externally to those who are working at a job site. The actions of other contractors could

put your employees in harm's way or vice versa. From an accountability standpoint, you have the obligation to make certain you make the other contractors aware of an unsafe situation so that your employees are not in harm's way, or correct a situation you may be causing so their employees are kept safe.

An example of what is necessary when implementing a behavior-based safety program, is a building material dealer who had a delivery truck show up at 4:30 on a Friday afternoon delivering kitchen cabinets. All the loading dock spots were full of trucks, most of them already ready for the next day's deliveries. The driver wanted to leave as quickly as possible, so he asked "I need to get going. Can you get one of your employees to help unload the truck?" The supervisor sent one of the employees out into the yard to start unloading the truck. In the course of unloading the truck and removing the cabinets, the employee fell off the back of the truck shattering his elbow.

The employee, was put in harm's way because they were focused on getting the truck out as quickly as possible instead of safety. They could have moved a fully loaded truck, thereby allowing the truck to come and be unloaded safely. Moving it would have taken less than five minutes, and probably would have shortened the amount of time needed to unload the truck. This incident could have been prevented by the supervisor simply telling the driver to wait till a truck was moved and he could pull in.

The result is an employee who will forever have problems with his elbow, and an employer whose increased experience modifier resulted in over $130,000 in additional premium. Why? This occurred because the supervisor put perceived productivity ahead of safety.

So, what occurred? From an employer's standpoint, the employer correctly suspended the supervisor without pay for two weeks to reinforce to all his employees and supervisors that management will not tolerate unsafe actions or short cuts. To have your message "heard" by your employees, you must reinforce your message with consequences.

As you can see, the goal of every organization is not just to be OSHA compliant, but to actually create a safer, more productivity-oriented culture, much like Paul O'Neill did at Alcoa.