Teamwork and Culture

Safety Talk

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Nearly everyone has heard sayings such as 'Many hands make light work' or 'None of us is as smart as all of us.'

These sayings refer to teamwork. Many people associate teamwork with sales teams or sports teams, but teamwork is also a vital element in keeping you and your co-workers safe and healthy on the job.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

Have you met a 'lone wolf' in the workplace? This type of person sticks to himself, shuns contact with others and isn't out to be friendly or popular with co-workers. The lone wolf doesn't need or want anyone's help. But from a safety standpoint, the lone wolf isn't helping anyone, least of all himself.

EXAMPLE

A worker at a care home is washing and dressing an 80-year-old quadriplegic resident alone, in spite of written procedures stating that a second worker needs to be present for this task. The resident falls from the bed and dies and the care home is fined by a government workplace safety and health agency.

In this case the lone worker wasn't hurt, but someone in his or her care died. However, lone workers are injured and killed on the job all the time and frequently, no one witnesses their deaths.

Certain jobs are designed to be performed by single workers, with little or no supervision. But if you 'work alone' among a group of workers, you may be putting your own safety and the safety of your co-workers at risk.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

When teamwork is a requirement in the workplace, there are several benefits, including these:

- A worker picks up a heavy object to see if he can handle its weight and

quickly realizes it’s too heavy to carry safely alone. Another worker spots him struggling and says, ‘Let me help you with that.’

- A supervisor holds a safety meeting to discuss a number of recent repetitive strain injuries in one area of the plant. He breaks the crew into two groups and asks them to brainstorm solutions to the problem. Ten minutes later, the teams offer up several solid ideas for tackling the issue.
- All new hires are teamed up with experienced ‘safety mentors? to watch out for them to ensure they are not working unsafely. The old hands enjoy their teaching moments and the new employees are relieved to be able to ask questions when they are unsure about procedures.
- A huge order comes in and the deadline seems impossibly short. But workers are split into teams to handle specific tasks and amazing progress is made within two days.
- People working within a team may discover talents, such as great leadership ability, that they didn’t know they had.
- Teamwork is an essential part of morale and safety culture in a workplace. If people feel that others are looking out for their safety and wellbeing, the workplace will be far more harmonious.

FINAL WORD

Teamwork reduces stress, brings great ideas, helps cut huge projects down to size and builds friendships and trust. It also helps keep people safe. In today’s hectic work settings, teamwork is more important than ever. Get on board.