

Adopt a Proactive Prevention Program and Increase Bottom-Line Profits

From the American Management Association's January 2010 LEADER'S EDGE newsletter:

In today's tough economic times, precious funds should not be wasted in coping with discriminatory harassment or union avoidance, or safety issues. These issues can be minimized or eliminated entirely—and critical funds saved for business operations—with a program designed to build the right corporate culture.

Corporate Culture Issues

The worth of such efforts may be seen in the example of one company with 15 steel processing plants and 1,500 employees, of which 1,200 are on industrial plant floors. You would expect this type of organization to be involved with several harassment lawsuits per year. With a typical settlement likely conservatively to be in excess of \$100,000 and the typical defense attorney fees to be an even higher amount, the unnecessary expense is substantial. However, since 1999, this organization has experienced no employment-related lawsuits. Throw into the mix a diverse workforce (various religions, races, and national origins), and add women working on the plant floor, the record becomes even more impressive. Even more incredible is the fact that these plants are not limited to traditionally nonlitigious locations, but this company's largest plants are in Detroit, Cleveland, northern Indiana, and Ohio.

This organization also had two of its plants vote in a union election in 1995. From 1998 to 1999, unions also obtained enough cards for an election to be held in two additional plants. In 1999, this organization won the election in one plant, the union withdrew before the election in the other, and the employees decertified one of the 1995 elected unions. Since 1999, this organization has been subjected to no union card campaigns.

In 1999, this organization recorded 300 workers compensation claims. Ten years later, with 50% more employees, there were less than 70 claims filed. That's over 230 injuries that did not happen. Two hundred and thirty real live people went home to their families intact and could work the next day.

How was this done and how can other organizations replicate these results?

It was a matter of giving responsibility to the organization's first-line supervisors and hourly workers.

Proactive Workplace Harassment Prevention

1. Redraft your Policy Against Discrimination and Harassment to be concise and understandable. Using plain English, such a policy can be reduced to as few as 350 words and still completely cover all topics.
2. Communicate and fully explain the policy with descriptive examples to all supervisory and salaried personnel. Use real-life examples, or a variation thereof, to enhance the learning process. Use imagery to get attendees to feel what it is like to be the victim of harassment or discrimination.
3. Teach all supervisory personnel how to effectively communicate the policy to nonsalaried personnel and require them to annually communicate the policy using a checklist. This demonstrates ownership in

the program by a supervisor who is observed everyday by hourly employees.

4. Teach all supervisory personnel how to effectively investigate a complaint. Company liability often results from an ineffective response to a complaint and an improper investigation of such complaint by organization personnel once they are put on notice.

5. Convince all salaried personnel that it is in their personal best interest to address a potential harassment situation even when no one is complaining. Information, persuasion, reasoning, and involvement are the most effective means for obtaining ownership in any policy. Addressing issues early on is the best way to establish the right Proactive Prevention Culture.

6. Involve all employees in the program. A Proactive Prevention Program that involves all employees, both salaried and non-salaried, creates a culture that does not tolerate harassment of any kind and is the most effective program to actually prevent harassment in the workplace. Peer pressure and the negative reaction of co-workers to inappropriate language, the use of derogatory terms, and unacceptable jokes or slurs will do more than anything else to eliminate and prevent harassment in the workplace.

Proactive Workforce Relationships

1. Create a new employee orientation program using the acronym 'MADRE,' which stands for Maintaining a Direct Relationship with Employees. This should also be included in any employee handbook.

2. Conduct pre-promotion supervisor-to-be MADRE education and Management Skills Training focused upon respect and appreciation. In this way, supervisory candidates can be further evaluated as to their ability to be effective supervisors.

3. Conduct workshops on MADRE and Management Skills Training (Responsibility, Inclusion, Treatment, Attitude and Atmosphere) for existing supervisors.

4.. Executive Management MADRE education completes the training process. Having top management experience the same training sends the right message of commitment to MADRE.

Besides helping build a positive relationship between management and employees, MADRE can discourage unionization.

Creating a Safety Culture of Proactive Prevention

1. Every time an accident occurs, ask one question: 'What can be done to prevent this, or something similar to this, from happening again?' More training is not a silver bullet. 'Employee carelessness', 'inattentiveness', and 'human error' are overused cop-outs.

2. Investigate every injury as if it were a death. Going a step further, why not investigate every close call,

inappropriately termed a 'near miss', as if it were a death.

3. Engineer a corrective action to not allow 'carelessness' to occur.
4. Instill a safety management style focused on why you are 'insisting on seat belts' (because you care about your people).
5. Expand the Safety Ownership/Awareness Hierarchy by explaining how it is in each employee's self-interest to reduce injuries. This means you won't need to deal with the trauma of a work-place accident, deal with lawyers, be deposed or called as a witness, find and train replacements, fill out reports, explain an accident to spouse and friends, etc.
6. Implement a legitimate, not-meant-to-punish, return-to-work program. Sitting home on the couch collecting a check is not in the employee's or organization's best interest. Identify meaningful work.
7. Provide supervisors with regular drug and alcohol training including how to detect signs of drug and alcohol use.
8. Conduct (surprise or planned) mock OSHA inspections (internal or hire contractor).
9. Use the non-enforcement, educational department at OSHA to perform informational inspections. The goal is to prevent accidents and injuries from occurring in the first case.

An effective Proactive Prevention Culture Program™ will improve your organization's bottom line by (a) creating a more pleasant and productive work environment, (b) preventing your best employees from being subjected to harassment, forced into a union or injured and (c) significantly reducing, if not eliminating, wasted expenses such as defense attorney fees, lawsuit settlement costs, union campaign consultant charges, labor attorney fees for collective bargaining negotiation and defense of arbitrations, and workers compensation insurance premium increases. How better to demonstrate that you truly care about your people than establishing a program of Proactive Prevention.