

Supervisors: When Planning Your Communications

As a supervisor, it's important to communicate with clarity, credibility and impact.

It's also the case that young people under the age of 25 process information differently, so it's important for supervisors to remember that they have different needs than older adults.

- Think about your points and organize your thoughts into a logical sequence for communications.
- Keep it simple. One safety message at a time, directly stated is more likely to be heard and understood. Focus advice on one area of performance.
- Be willing to repeat yourself. It's better to give brief and specific feedback several times over a few months than have one long feedback session.
- Reinforce your messaging in different ways. "Remember to ..."
- Be supportive. When a behaviour is a safety issue, provide immediate, constructive feedback on how it needs to be done.
- Express appreciation. Good, safe behaviour should be rewarded with positive feedback. Try to avoid mixed messages.
- Be precise -- use concrete language and examples to explain what you mean so there is no room for misinterpretation.
- Mind your body language. Body language, voice tone (how you speak) and words (what you say) can impact communication effectiveness. Avoid the sarcastic eye roll or frustrated gestures or sighs. You might need to ask for feedback yourself on how you come across in discussions – take this as an opportunity to show how to receive feedback in a positive way.
- Discuss sensitive matters in person, regardless of the preference of employees for online communication. Matters of conflict or emotion can be made worse by email.
- Get to know your operators. Build a culture of safety so operators provide one another with corrective feedback.
- Walk your talk. Make sure you are not taking short-cuts or exhibiting unsafe behaviours.
- Embrace digital communications. Although face-to-face communications are important, reinforcement and other types of communication can be equally as effective when made by text message, email or on a digital bulletin board, for example.

Mentoring

A great method of training and supervision is to have peers, including more experienced young operators, and older, experienced operators as mentors. This provides a positive experience for new and more senior co-workers alike.

Training

Knowledge is power and powerful when it comes to safety. Your employer (municipality) must effectively communicate all training and policies so that each operator is equipped with the knowledge required to accurately and safely perform tasks assigned. Operators who are trained are more likely to embrace a positive safety culture. Even the best safety plans and information are only useful if they are well known and understood by operators.

Repetition and Routine

It isn't possible for an operator to memorize the safety manual during orientation, so supervisors should routinely communicate relevant safety information to operators, especially if there are changes to equipment or processes. A supervisor should review all key messages given in training in communications that are regular and clear. Using active, participatory training methods, for example where a young operator learns to recognize hazards and examine and solve real work problems are a great idea.

Offering Training Opportunities

Offer one-on-one communication and timely feedback on performance. When coaching or mentoring, make sure to balance corrective feedback with praise. Although effective in the past, the traditional "I tell—you do" school of management is no longer effective. Remember that everyone was new once. Remember that when employees ask "Why?" saying "Because we've always done things this way", is not a great response.

Be willing to explain, be patient. Pace work so that there is adequate time to communicate effectively. When you offer a coaching style of management, provide time for finding out what is working and what isn't.

Conclusion

Providing effective orientation, clear communications, training and ongoing direct or indirect supervision are the best way to make sure young and new operators are prepared to keep themselves and others healthy and safe on the job.