

The Value of Safety Meetings
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Every company has a safety meeting with their employees from time to time. If they don't, they should. Time is always short when there's business to conduct, but if you don't take the time to discuss safety with your employees in a meaningful way, you run the risk of losing control of your potential losses. In the transportation industry it does not matter what you transport: There are plenty of opportunities for losses!

One opportunity to make a meaningful step toward maintaining control is to have a meeting with your employees to discuss safety and *their relationship and responsibility in keeping your company in business*. But, has the employee safety meeting become a routine where employees merely air their "gripes" or where the presentation does not generate any interest from the employees and has provided little value by its conclusion? These are important questions to ask if your safety program needs to become more effective, and, by extension, any value to your company. In fact, everything you do in your company should bring value to it.

Safety meetings take many forms. They can be a valuable tool for the company to stress its corporate safety ethic and to reinforce to its employees the necessity of safety in the workplace, but also out on the road where the public's safety is at risk and your company has the opportunity to project its public image. A solid employee safety ethic is vital for safety to gain roots in a company's work culture. Attitude, behavior, work habits (including driving) are vital for a company that wishes to remain in business. A safety

meeting should be used to keep the bonds that cement that company's safety ethic in place. This is the company's opportunity to sell the (safety) product.

Some company's use the safety meeting to meet state regulations that mandate some form of safety communication with its employees. The worst kind is to have a supervisor who is not behind the program 100% run the show. His or her attitude about the value of such a meeting isn't hard to figure out. They'd rather be doing something entirely different than standing up in front of their fellow workers talking about a subject that he or she feels everyone should already know everything about. Their lack of enthusiasm will quickly reveal itself. Most supervisors of this type are simply anxious to get the meeting over so they can get back to work. They wrap it up and make sure everyone signs the sign-in sheet so they can document they had a meeting.

A more valuable meeting is like one that a member company put on for its employees recently. Every quarter they hold a meeting at the start of one of the week's work day, usually the first day of the month. One of the crew cooks breakfast and they sit down and after finishing, they have their meeting. This puts everyone in a good mood to begin with, a wise move, and then the owner makes a few remarks about how the company is doing and what challenges they are facing with the economy. This brings in everybody's interest as the success of the company depends a lot on what they do for their work, and....keeping costs down by not incurring losses.

During the meeting, they talk about fleet insurance, the cost of workers' compensation, the cost of products to sell (in this case fuel oil and propane), and how important each of the drivers and others are to the overall operation. If the company goes out of business, they're all looking for new jobs. In this economy this is a challenge no matter what age you are.

The next item on the agenda was a group exercise. Taking a cue from the annual NHMTA/VTBA Truck Driving Championship held in Concord, the mechanic took one of the delivery trucks out of service and planted eight or ten defects and each driver was given ten minutes to find them. This sounds much more simple than it is. The pressure is on, you are competing with your fellow workers, and you want to win.

For most drivers, this should be a cinch. It's not. Depending on how clever the defects are, and some are NOT so obvious if you don't know what to look for, it can be a challenge.

Not every defect is an out-of-service (OOS) defect, such as a non-operational turn signal. Something this simple is an OOS because the turn signal is vital to alerting others in front of or behind the driver and usually only one is provided for each side of the vehicle, whereas brake lights are on both sides of the truck and function simultaneously. Only one has to be visible. This does not mean that you don't repair the broken light. It must be reported on the post trip report and replaced before the next day's first trip.

For the safety-conscious company, a spare set of bulbs carried in the glove compartment is standard operating procedure. It's a simple method to help ensure that the truck isn't declared out-of-service at an inspection station.

Making sure that the brakes are properly adjusted is another factor. As a driver operates the vehicle, he or she has to be "in tune" with the vehicle and feel when the brakes might be out of adjustment. A driver has to plan on getting dirty if they are going to do a proper pre-trip. This means examining the slack adjuster to see if it is in compliance with specifications. This includes looking at all fittings and connections to make certain that the vehicle is safe to operate.

This type of exercise is easy to do and at the end of the meeting, the time spent has been valuable. And isn't that the point?

Make your safety meetings valuable and worth the effort and time you and your employees put into them. If you, as an employer, want your employees to be safe drivers, they have to believe that you are really earnest about safe driving. After all, your company vehicle is one BIG rolling billboard of who you are and what you do. Is that *your* name on the side of that truck?

If it is, you want to be certain that your employee is a good representative of your company. There is no better advertisement for a transportation company than safely delivering the products you carry and having a safe driver out there on the road.

For the employer, the challenge becomes one of making sure every employee, including the supervisors, understands the importance of safe operations. Getting that message across in a forum where you take the time to reinforce your company's safety philosophy is your best method of bringing value to your safety program.

If you need assistance in fine tuning your company's approach to safety and safety meetings, give us a call: we're here to help.