

Increasing involvement in your safety-team meetings

By Jennifer Lingafelter and Natalie Reno

Before you begin

Do your safety-team meetings remind you of a teacher posing questions to the class, but none of the students are paying attention, responding or making any effort to enter into the discussion? Are you the only person who initiates conversations during safety-team meetings? Do you find yourself answering your own questions during these team meetings? If you did not attend the meeting, would the other members just sit there and not say anything?



Introduction

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you are not alone. Many safety-team leaders experience these common frustrations. Fortunately, there are simple techniques for helping alleviate these frustrations and make your safety-team meetings more fun, engaging and productive.

The tips below may help increase involvement in your team meetings.

Before the meeting begins

- o Schedule a different team member or department to host the meeting each month.
- o Prepare an agenda in advance and allow a time slot for comments/updates from each member.
- o Invite a non-member to attend each meeting, acknowledge his or her attendance in the meeting and ask him or her for input during the meeting. A new perspective member may provide more ideas.
- o On a regular basis, invite your company's executive team to attend the team meetings. To help diffuse anxiety and spur creativity, provide fidget toys, such as gel-filled balls and bendable figures on the table. Make sure the room's setting is conducive to discussion and participation. Arrange the room in a horseshoe or square so everyone can see one another.

- o Consider changing the meeting time. Employees generally have a shorter attention span immediately after lunch or at the end of the day. However, they tend to be more alert and engaged in the morning.
- o Provide a small incentive such as a piece of candy or a pen for members who contribute or take on tasks.
- o Invite a guest speaker and occasionally add a topic that is not directly related to workplace safety (e.g., holiday safety at home).

Breaking the ice

- o Ask each team member to list one safe activity he or she does outside the work day. This breaks the ice and gets the member to think about safety.
- o Show a picture and ask each one to identify an unsafe condition or behavior.
- o Do a team building or group problem-solving exercise.
- o Assign roles at each meeting (e.g., timekeeper, note taker, facilitator and scribe) so more members actively participate.
- o Let the team members have a prominent voice in making decisions. This includes setting goals, determining the meeting time and location and developing agenda items. This helps the members feel like it is their meeting.

- o Rotate team roles at each meeting. Encourage a quiet member to be the timekeeper so he or she participates, but is not uncomfortable at the same time.
- o Ask for progress updates from the assigned member. However, do not provide the update for the member.
- o Assign each team member (or small group) a topic to present at each meeting.

Idea generation

- o When brainstorming ideas, have small groups work together to generate ideas. Use large- group feedback to list the ideas.
- o When soliciting ideas, use a soft ball (i.e., Koosh ball) to toss back and forth in the room. Each person who catches the ball must provide one idea.
- o Give everyone two pennies and each time a member speaks, the member must give up a penny. In this way the members get to add their "2 cents" to the meeting.
- o To solicit ideas, go around the room and ask each member by name for one idea. If needed, go around a second or third time until you exhaust all the ideas.
- o Whenever possible, ask open-ended questions to prevent the members from answering with short yes or no responses.

At the end of the meeting

1. Go around the room and ask each member, by name, if he or she has any comments, concerns or suggestions.
2. Assign each person or sub-team a task to follow up on after the meeting.
3. To make sure you communicate the team's progress throughout the company, assign a member this task. For example, encourage the member to use production or staff meetings and bulletin boards to keep the employees up to date on the latest team accomplishments.

Group activity

Review these tips with your safety-team members. Ask each member to choose three to five tips he or she thinks will increase meeting involvement. Tally up the votes. Then take the three to five tips receiving the most votes and develop an action plan for implementing them.

Look online or at the library for icebreaker activities. Try one activity at the next team meeting. Once the team completes it, discuss how the icebreaker relates to safety or team building.

Conclusion

To be effective, all team members must actively participate. During every meeting, you can engage the members in the team's content or its methods. It takes more time to plan for effective meetings. However, planning makes it easier to reach your goals and even have some fun along the way.

Reference

BWC's Division of Safety & Hygiene *Effective Safety Teams class*

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