

SAFE TEA TIME

Circles of Influence



by Ir. Shum Keng Yan

THIS month we look at influencing the organisation. I call this the "Circles of Influence". I am sure that in life you will have encountered various types of people. Each person will have his/her own belief and opinion. This makes it more challenging to create a common culture.

Well, the simplest way an organisation can set an expectation is to enforce a set of values that employees need to adhere to. This is then supported by procedures and rules, which are necessary. However, to sustain long-term changes, we need to support the process through a 'buy-in'.

One method is the use of influence to build a safety culture. For simplicity sake, let us segment the organisation into RED, YELLOW and GREEN employees.

- RED** – This group of employees are disengaged from safety. They might superficially demonstrate safety; however, inherently they are not fully convinced.
- YELLOW** – The bulk of the employees in an organisation fall into this group. They will move in either direction and can be influenced either way.
- GREEN** – This group of employees are the true believers and supporters. They are highly engaged and you can spot them volunteering for safety projects.

In designing our safety programmes, which group should we focus on more? I suppose the REDs are our high-risk group. However, time and again, we tend to (like to) work more with the GREENs as this is the easier group to work with.

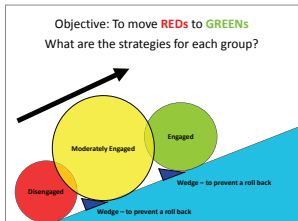


Figure 1

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

What are the strategies that we can employ? Let us have a quick look.

Let us look at the REDs. This group requires strong evidence that safety is beneficial for them. I suppose getting some help from the GREENs who are close friends with the REDs can help. This group usually responds to directions from a higher authority and opinion leaders. Lastly, if all else fails, the "law says so" is a good line to apply.

The YELLOWs, meanwhile, should receive encouragement to get involved in safety. This group requires mentoring and coaching. This is where our opportunity lies in creating a safety culture.

The GREENs are our great asset. Tap them for support and ideas to run your safety programmes. Empower them!

KEEPING THE GAINS

The danger is that some of your supporters (GREENs and YELLOWs) might roll back (e.g. YELLOW going back to RED). We need to employ "wedges". Wedges act as stoppers to prevent rolling backwards. What wedges can we use? Let us have a look at some of the methods.

The GREENs require more recognition. They put in a lot of effort and thus should receive adequate recognition and reward. Recognise their expertise with key positions as EHS campaign leaders. Put in extra effort to maintain their enthusiasm.

As for the YELLOWs, keep them informed of the benefits of safety. Keep them involved in safety campaigns. The key idea is to keep them in the loop on safety and what is in it for them.

I am sure you do not go around the organisation compartmentalising your colleagues into RED, YELLOW and GREEN. However, this is a simple way to structure the effort you need to put into each group of internal customers to serve them better. Combine this technique with the Safety Communication and Key Messaging techniques (March 2012 to June 2012 issues).

How do you strategise to influence your organisation? Share with us at pub@iem.org.my. ■

It is not just about what you know about safety, but also who you know who really care about safety and will ultimately make or break your safety culture!