

Overcoming a Safety Plateau:

Southern California Edison's Business Customer Division adopts culture change to address longstanding safety issues



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We'd been trying the same approach to improve employee safety for a long time and had some success, but were still experiencing a lot of safety incidents. We began to realize that we might not achieve success without some kind of breakthrough. We are the Business Customer Division (BCD), a microcosm of Southern California Edison. We're approximately 280 employees in various roles: Engineers, Pump Testers, Project Managers, Account Managers, Analysts, and Energy Advisors who serve approximately 300,000 business customers.

In the past, our safety focus was mainly on numbers, compliance, and understanding policies. Safety was talked about at orientation and in the procedural manual, and then the manual was put away in a cabinet somewhere. Safety was mainly the safety team's job.

We had to find ways to get people to change their behavior because it's the right thing to do, and for their own benefit, not necessarily

because there is a rule in place. We began to explore Culture Change. We talked about how wearing your seatbelt took a long time to adopt as a common practice. It took a lot of awareness, constant focus, and time for the culture to change. Like the seat belt example, we asked ourselves: "Do I do things safely, even when no one is watching?" We realized we needed to look at our culture and see where we could get better, and allow ourselves to challenge the process and look at things differently.

TOP DOWN-BOTTOM UP IMPLEMENTATION

Any monumental achievement starts with leadership and culture change, and a key driver in our journey was leadership commitment. The challenge from our leadership to the Grassroots Safety Leadership Team was to eradicate Repetitive Motion Injuries (RMIs). Our office employees were experiencing a high number of RMIs and we knew we needed to help.

At first, we thought, "There's no way we could eradicate RMIs completely, no one can do this." Then we realized that our leaders had given us their confidence to accomplish this. As one leader said, "We can benchmark and learn from other companies, but we need to come up with our own ideas and processes so that our team can get behind it one-hundred percent. That's how we'll become world-class in whatever we do." Leadership offered their full support.

A 5-point plan was established to address safety challenges from five critical areas: Engineering, Enforcement, Education, Behavior and Culture Change. The first three areas represent the traditional safety approach and we acknowledged the important role those play in

solving our safety challenges. But now we were committed to making a very intentional effort to focus on culture as well.

GRASSROOTS INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

We recruited the “Best and Brightest” on our Grassroots Safety Team, because you can’t solve your greatest challenges without having your top minds working on the issues. The team offered an opportunity to contribute and leverage the star power and talent of our members. There is a lot of untapped energy with our people and being on the team allowed them to “challenge the process,” take risks, and make a difference.

The first thing the Grassroots Safety Team did was to use Safety Culture Tools, specifically Culture Change Consultant’s Culture Iceberg® with our groups. We needed to get under the surface, and understand what was really going on that we haven’t addressed. Use of the safety culture tools surfaced underlying norms and assumptions, which indicated an unwillingness to “complain,” as well as employees who remained “silent sufferers.”

We began proactive “ergonomic sweeps” by safety team members, employees, and managers, actively encouraging employees to do things differently because it’s the right thing to do, to take time for ergo breaks when their bodies tell them, whether at home or work. We made it easy to get ergo equipment, a welcome change from the weeks that employees used to wait to get a new mouse or chair. We practiced speaking up to leadership about discomfort, and we had leadership practice responding to employees, so they knew how to respond with care. We shared examples of employees who were willing to report an injury and get help, to talk about the pain they went through...and they still had their jobs.

RESULTS ARE SURPRISING

The safety results show marked improvement in terms of RMI reduction. But our measures of success go beyond the numbers, to improvement in the safety culture: more employees are asking for help proactively; not suffering silently; employees feel the barriers are breaking down between leadership and front-line employees.

WHAT WE’VE LEARNED

There has been a mind shift from the traditional view of safety’s measures of success. We are moving beyond the focus on numbers/data (head) to include the people/engagement (heart). It’s not just the safety team, but everyone is becoming a safety champion.

Grassroots teams come up with great ideas to find new ways to approach safety. Leadership is breaking down barriers to the traditional hierarchy relationship, so that all feel free to speak up, no matter what role or title.

We are building momentum and continue to build safety ambassadors who are willing to do what’s right, even when no one is watching.



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