Bill Smith discusses how adopting a safety culture is easier than you think. In fact, your safety plan can be the strongest protection your company has from risk.

A culture of safety

It's not exactly breaking news that the crane, rigging and heavy transport industries have their fair share of workplace hazards. Year after year, thousands of injuries occur in these industries, along with hundreds of fatal accidents. In 2019 alone, OSHA reported 1,066 deaths in the construction and extraction occupations, and a staggering 1,481 deaths in the transportation and material moving sector. Those two occupational groups were by far the most dangerous in terms of fatalities, and when you consider the complexity and very nature of the equipment and operations involved in these industries, it's not surprising.

More surprising to us at NBIS is the number of companies we encounter with lackluster (or worse, nonexistent) safety programs. All too often, safety is low on the priority list or essentially left off altogether – and if this sounds familiar to you, now's the time to take stock and get a plan in place. Because at the end of the day, safety is just too important to leave to chance or half-baked plans. In fact, we believe firmly in the necessity of developing an organizational culture of safety – what we generally refer to as safety culture – that is well-thought-out and reaches into all corners of the organization.

Company wide commitment

The first key to creating and maintaining your company's safety culture is education. One element we see again and again in companies with strong safety records is a long-term and company-wide commitment to learning. The first thing this does is removes your risk of fines and other negative consequences, since OSHA standards state that training must be continuing and ongoing across most occupations. Simply put, from a compliance standpoint, ongoing training protects you from fines and penalties. However, training is not just about avoiding financial loss – it's about protecting the lives and well-being of your employees.

The other benefit of continuous, ongoing training is that it keeps safety top of mind for your team and sends the message that your company is truly committed to safety. Think about it: when the last time you heard about a company initiative or objective was six months to a year ago, you're highly likely to assume, consciously or not, that the initiative in question is unimportant or very low on the priority list.

You can't expect your workers to develop a strong safety culture because they attend meetings once a year, or even once a month. Building a work culture that prioritizes safety takes time and practice, and this goal needs to be built into the daily routine of your company.

Anytime, anywhere access

One issue we often hear from our insureds and peers is how time-consuming creating a safety culture at your company can be. Without question, building a strong safety culture takes a great deal of time and effort, and there really aren't any shortcuts. On top of that, many companies in crane and rigging, concrete pumping, and specialized transportation are relatively small businesses where fleet owners often wear several hats. It's no surprise that safety training can easily fall by the wayside when faced with the daily challenges of keeping your cranes working and your trucks on the road. But it's just too important on too many levels to skip over safety.

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The great news is that you don't have to accomplish this goal alone. There are numerous tools and resources available to help you build, manage, and maintain a strong safety culture in your company. We often recommend to our insureds the adoption and continued use of an online safety training tool like the learning solutions offered by Industrial Training International (ITI). This is hands-down one of the most effective ways to automate and simplify safety training. Software-based safety training allows compliance officers to set up courses, create lessons, and automate the learning process. Once a safety course is in place, employees simply log in and complete coursework as time allows – and many online training solutions are accessible anytime, anywhere. This takes away much of the burden of scheduling and facilitating education sessions and monitoring progress – and since the work takes place online, progress is automatically updated and saved.

Another advantage of software-based safety training is the ability to create specialized learning paths. Simply put, a learning path is a curated selection of courses tied together to teach a particular subject. Paths are often set up in a way that relates to the information the employee has already learned to the next lesson. It's an effective way to contextualize safety training, helping learners see the big picture as they progress through the course. Learning paths also help to break up potentially complicated safety lessons into manageable pieces. Users can track their progress, helping them understand where they are in the process and how far

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they have to go before completing their training.

Software-based safety instruction also provides easier and enhanced access for your employees. An online component grants workers 24-hour access to safety lessons, removing the need to work around schedules in order to squeeze in training. That way, the employee learns when they are ready and engaged, rather than hurrying through coursework to get it out of the way. They can also leverage downtime to learn new skills and brush up on existing ones, which means what could be considered wasted time instead is put to good use.

Staying on top of the paperwork involved in safety training can be a full-time job on its own. Safety training software allows you to automate that process, making it easier to keep track of key expiration dates for certifications and licenses. This way, you can stay ahead of deadlines and give your employees the time and preparation they need to renew certifications and licenses. On top of that, should an incident occur at your company, you have proof of training on record. As we often say, preparation is the best defense. These

benefits are a great way to start on a track of being proactive, not reactive.

Your strongest defense

All of these elements are important to a robust safety culture, but one thing to keep in mind is that it's up to you to keep your employees committed and engaged. Educational material needs to be dynamic and interesting as well as convey information vital to the employee's work. Otherwise, learning becomes a chore. This is another area where an online learning solution can be beneficial. Online tools often provide virtual demonstrations that replicate hands-on field training, and are immersive and engaging ways to teach. We've seen our insured companies respond very positively to online training that is specific to their specialized fields, so don't forget to choose a training and learning solution that makes sense for your specific industry. This way, your team starts a course or lesson and immediately sees the value for them in their role.

Finally, consider that virtual learning lends itself well to employee engagement due to its ability to be gamified, which involves using the principles of game

design to challenge employees to learn in an environment that keeps scores and measures success. Using elements like leaderboards, levels, and badges, gamification changes the basic nature of learning. It turns the process into an engaging, interactive experience.

That being said, you will want to be careful with how you approach any kind of incentivized or gamified safety course. While OSHA does not prohibit incentivized safety programs, it clearly discourages employers from designing these programs to penalize workers for any reason. In other words, such programs should only be used to reward participation, not punish.

We truly cannot say it enough – a robust, ingrained safety culture is the strongest protection your company has from risk. Realizing the importance of, as well as the effort needed to implement and maintain an effective training program is the first step. After that, it makes sense to utilize tools and programs to assist you. Software alone can't create a strong safety culture, but when coupled with intentional, company-wide training, online training software makes for a powerful ally. ∎