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Labor-Management Relations and Workers' Comp

Over the last 17 years we have had the privilege of working with hundreds of thousands of employees across the U.S. & Canada to help prevent costly and painful back and other sprain/strain injuries. It is fascinating to experience the diverse and numerous jobs that people perform every day across North America.

It is also interesting to witness management/labor relations within our client organizations. Morale is an important dynamic of any organization or group. It can affect production, profitability, turnover, talent acquisition, and the personal happiness of each and every person in the organization.



It is always refreshing for us to walk into an organization where labor and management get along well and trust each other. I must also comment that it is not as common as we would like to think, and some might even consider it rare.

Many of our clients have told us that our injury prevention processes go a long way to enhancing morale. In the early years I scratched my head wondering how we did that, as it was noticeably true. Somehow we were permeating communication barriers that existed between employee populations and the management team to enhance the trust factor between the two.

We have often perceived barriers between employees and management that were significant enough to make us question how any constructive work could get done. These barriers are often accompanied by a type of pervading negative energy that at times is palpable.

Have you ever been alone in an elevator when someone else gets on? Did you both then just stare up at the changing floor numbers in silence?

We seem to be able to make a "field" around us at times to create space between strangers and ourselves. We use that same "skill" to create another type of energy that lets people know we are upset with them. Some husbands have called it the deadly "silent treatment." However, silence can be endured. It is the unspoken, almost electrically charged energy that tacitly communicates "uh-oh, it might be safer being in another zip code right now," that is the "deadly" component.

Human relations and communication is a fascinating subject. It seems as though communication is accomplished easier between people when they like and trust each other. The more we like and the more we trust another the more pleasant that "energy" is, thus facilitating good communication to take place. Conversely, when we are mad at someone or distrust them we create a "field" between them and us that is as thick and effective as a cinder block wall at stopping good communication.

Now take tens, hundreds, or thousands of employees that work in the same place. They collectively will form a sort of group personality and this same communication phenomenon applies.

Do these employees share a collective mindset toward management that negatively affects their communication with management? By the same token, does management, as a group, share a similar mindset that creates underlying communication barriers between them and employees?

Not so coincidentally we find that when significant issues exist between management and labor, Workers' Comp costs seem to be higher.

We went into one very large company and boy, oh boy was that atmosphere virulent! We were hired to train several thousand employees on how to prevent back and shoulder injuries. The costs of these injuries and the loss time were significantly impacting profit and production.

Note: Prior to implementing our Backsafe® or Sittingsafe® training programs we always conduct on-site pre-assessments for each job description to thoroughly customize the workshops for the employees. The key to our Workers' Comp cost reduction success is our ability to communicate to any employee population. It is a critical ingredient to getting employees to change their physical behaviors while conducting work related and at-home activities.

In this particular case, during the pre-assessment, we discovered that we had our hands full due to the level of disharmony between these employees and the management team. The mutual distrust was significant.

When we began doing our on-site pre-assessment we of course were looked upon as an extension of management. We felt as wanted as a Dean at the Friday night frat party.

We can predict that any training done with a negative energy barrier in the way will not result in a significant change in employees' behavior and thus no significant Workers' Comp savings would result. This is precisely why we have spent considerable research over the years into how to eliminate this barrier between us and the employees.

By the time we got done training this large employee population, management was getting thank you notes from employees for bringing us in to help them. We knew after the first week of training that there would be a great financial outcome for our client because, as is the norm, we were able to successfully break through this communication barrier. We ended up reducing back and neck injuries by over 60% and with their union highly endorsing our company.

Developing our Backsafe® and Sittingsafe® program was a task of combining the sciences of anatomy, biomechanics, ergonomics, stretching, and kinesiology, etcetera, with the **art of communicating!!**

Without our ability to penetrate communication barriers that may exist between labor and management, our results would be the same as any other failed attempt to prevent costly back strains and sprains. However, we have come to know how to break through these barriers to get employees to accept the Backsafe® and Sittingsafe® principles as valuable and to apply them at work and at home.

Embedding injury prevention principles through employees into a corporate culture takes more than downloading "facts" and ergonomic "do's and don'ts" from the internet. It takes the medium of artful communication to cut through the labor-management barriers, the education and language barriers, and to get the employees to willfully bring their *minds* and their bodies to the training.

If sprain/strain injuries represent more than 30% of your Workers' Comp losses you now have a solution. Today's economy no longer permits public entities or corporations to be passive about Workers' Comp. You now must prevent expensive claims before you end up paying for them. The great news is that when you stop back injuries and other sprains/strains the return on investment is often in the "windfall" category.

Look back at your losses over the last 3 years. If that report is dotted with expensive sprain/strains, if you have had trouble preventing workplace injuries in the past, call me. We just may enhance your employee morale at the same time we eliminate these Workers' Comp claims.

I look forward to speaking with you.

Dennis Downing, President
Future Industrial Technologies

Check out our new blog: www.backsafe.wordpress.com. Any injury prevention/safety type topics you'd like to see covered there? Please let us know. We love suggestions and feedback.

We look forward to helping you to "Prevent Tomorrow's Injuries Today," right now!

We're TWITTERing! Keep current on the latest in injury prevention by following us. Find "backsafe" at www.twitter.com/backsafe! Find us on Facebook too!

This article may be reprinted in its entirety provided that the following resource is left intact:

Dennis Downing is the founder and President of Future Industrial Technologies, Inc., a nationwide Industrial Injury Prevention Training Company. It specializes in improving conditions at work and in life by utilizing the proprietary injury prevention programs, BACKSAFE® and SITTINGSAFE®, that have proven to be highly successful at reducing workers comp costs within companies of all sizes and descriptions.

Future Industrial Technologies, Inc.
4930 Cervato Way
Santa Barbara, CA 93111
Call Toll Free: 1 (800) 775-2225
Tel: (805) 967-2485
Fax: (805) 967-2487
Email: info@backsafe.com
<http://www.backsafe.com>