

SafeBuild Alliance Supervisors Roundtable Summary

The high demand for construction services means our crafts and crews are constantly changing. In the Portland metro area, we have a stable, professional, experienced craft community that has long embraced injury-free workplace concepts and practices. However, the volume of construction requires continual introduction of new apprentices and travelers and can challenge our strong safety culture.

SafeBuild Alliance is committed to bringing awareness and resources to our members in promoting zero incidents through collaboration. We want to help supervisors lead new members of our construction community to quickly embrace our vibrant safety culture.

On March 15th, 2023, the SafeBuild Alliance brought together industry field supervisors in a Supervisor Leadership Roundtable to share common concerns, challenges, and best practices to enhance safety culture and familiarize field leaders with SafeBuild Alliance. Supervisors that attended the meeting created dialog on targeted subjects that supervisors face and to share solutions to build and improve safety culture in construction.

Q 1 – How do you effectively coach employees?

- Lead by example.
- Ask questions, get input to gain buy-in.
- Good, sound planning illuminates back-end issues.
- Fully explain and provide details – both the good and the bad – the “whole picture.”
- Learn from the mistakes you can live with.
- Less emphasis on hard and fast rules, more on the best interest of the employee.
- Give background on the process of incidents and all it takes to manage an injury.
- Provide the requirements and resources to be successful.
- Explain the “why” when coaching so crews understand the meaning of performing safe work.
- Address bad habits immediately and replace them with new habits. Recognize positive and safe behaviors.

Q 2 – How do you show employees that you care about their safety and well-being?

- Process and deliver clear messages and expectations during safety meetings. Coach and encourage apprentices and journeymen who buy-in to safety to read the topic. This can create inclusion and let the crew learn a variety of aspects of the trade.
- Be present at the morning huddle with the crew and safety. Share and report on the day’s planned events can get things going in the right direction.
- Making sure the jobsite is safe and ready – safe access, acceptable housekeeping, etc.
- Taking responsibility and setting an example for my own safety, then setting that expectation for others.
- Engage younger or new employees in learning about safe work practices.
- Recognize that some employees don’t want to speak up and that others are good at sharing. Create a safe space/circle of trust that isn’t threatening for employees to ask questions or provide input without feeling judged.
- Let the crew know they have more than just one person they can talk with. Provide multiple resources/individuals for workers to engage with and learn from.
- Follow-up with people when something is brought up in a safety meeting or morning huddle. Even if the item is or is not complete, follow-up so employees know they are heard.
- Get upper-level management to walk the job and stop and talk with crew members. Be approachable to the workers with intentional interactions.

- Get to know the other trades so everyone can talk about issues and share concerns for everyone’s safety.
- Implement some action:
 - Physical card for stopping unsafe work – Stop Work Authority.
 - See something, say something, do something.
 - Have the GUTS to speak up.
 - GUTS room/safe space for workers who need to decompress.
 - When someone gets married, has a baby, etc. they get a card from the company.
- Explain reminders and rules so workers know why managers must enforce safety. Reasons being other than “because I said so”.
- Create a positive working environment to build morale.
- Safety is part of the job. It is not a separate function or department.
- Provide hats, T-shirts, etc. for swag that shows appreciation for their work.
- Treat everyone as part of the team and do your best to be helpful and inclusive.

Q3 – What can we do to be better mentors/buddies to employees?

- Speak up. Talk about the tasks at hand so there is active learning.
- Supervisor must be open to receive input from the apprentice. Respectfully offer options and guidance rather than immediately discounting what they can bring to the scenario.
- If the super is younger, they could use tactics to convince older trades workers that the techniques they are relaying are valid. It adds “cred” to the technique.
- As a mentor, learn what they don’t know by asking them questions and address that. Have them show you that they understand, even if they say they do understand.
- Be aware of the impact that an ego can have on education and training. Have a respectful delivery when coaching or offering advice based on expertise.
- Gain trust – explicitly ask people what they think. Some may feel hesitant to speak up.
- Give apprentices permission to not know things. Open that space, so they feel comfortable asking questions or for assistance.
- Admit what you did wrong to build trust and allow apprentices to make mistakes or ask about something.
- Admit when you don’t know something; take feedback as collaborative problem-solving.
- Build a personal relationship with the people you train. Humanize the experience to build trust.
- Some of the experienced folks might not know some of the newest technology. Acknowledge that to allow employees to ask questions without feeling belittled. Relate to folks not knowing everything and making space for that.
- Relate to the worker by telling them what you experienced as an apprentice. Build rapport. Make connections; invest in their success. Personalize the relationship. Lead with support rather than pressure.
- Be a role model advocating for the safe approach. It shows the apprentice that you are wholly engaged in safe practice even if it’s not the easy way.
- Get in there with the tools to demonstrate the skills. Do the hard work. Demonstrates the skill but also builds rapport.
- Work with apprentices to know the sequencing of things so they aren’t overwhelmed.
- Give positive feedback; reinforce that mistakes are normal and part of learning. Be good humored about mistakes when appropriate.
- Give them space to try and focus on innovations, within reason. Psychological safety to think independently.
- Communicate corrective actions to the side and away from the crew, not publicly. Encourage apprentices to come up with and communicate ideas.
- Connect new workers with safety-minded workers. Utilize those that are leaders.
- Be honest with people when they make a mistake, tailor feedback to the individual.

Q4 – How do you engage your crews to be more involved in effective planning?

- Morning huddles (required for all) discussing logistics of the day and the near future. Share beneficial communication for all contractors.
- Coach subs who don't do them or don't do them well.
- Implement Pre-task plan competitions to give workers an incentive.
- Provide training on how to write a PTP. Share the drafting of the pre-task plan and importance of entire crew participation.
- Ask open-ended questions to get more detailed answers.
- Leave stuff off the plan to test the workers and daylight the item for coaching if they miss it.
- Repetition and coaching newer workers on how to recognize hazards and complete pre-tasks.
- Purposeful engagement of checked out, lost or new workers.
- Have the crew take turns writing the Pre-Task Plan but still have the entire crew committed to writing it together.
- Empower non-English speakers by making the pre-task plan in alternative languages.
- Find and recognize natural leaders in the crews both Hispanic and English speakers.
 - Leverage influencers!
- Sell the value and engagement goes up in the crew. When you get the why and share it

Q5 – When is discipline the right tactic? How do you approach discipline?

It is the last resort and depends on the situation after investigating the facts. Consider, was the situation willful, severe including injury/damages, gross negligence, a series of patterned issues?

How receptive to coaching was the employee, which may also lead to discipline if they demonstrated a bad attitude or not taking the issue seriously.

Steps to approaching discipline:

- Superintendent/Foreman investigates issue with support from safety. You want safety to remain approachable and not be the disciplinarian.
- Approach the employee privately with an appropriate witness/union rep if applicable.
- [STAR AR](#) is a useful model for providing feedback (Outline situation/task, action, result).
- Listen and seek to understand when asking open ended questions.
- After using a coaching approach, or depending on the outcome of the investigation, follow progressive discipline steps verbal documented, written, final/suspension and separation.
- Use empathy when appropriate.
- Joe from McKinstry recommended the book, "[Never Split the Difference](#)" by Chris Voss.

Q6 – How do you handle conflict or difficult conversations?

- Build trust with the team so when conflicts arise it allows for a healthier conversation.
 - Getting to know your team upfront helps when a job is stressful.
- Be someone that lays out the expectations in the beginning. If people know your expectations, it can help minimize future conflict.
- Understanding conflict is critical. What is the problem that needs to be worked out.
- Work to de-escalate emotions. Control your emotions.
- Try and get a sense for how the parties in conflict are feeling. What is their attitude like.
 - Seek to understand before you seek to be understood.

- Ask questions to get a sense for where people are coming from.
- Don't assume where people are mentally.
- If emotions are too high separate people until things cool down.
- Be a mentor and coach. Help people through conflict and coach them to help in the future.
 - Lead by example. If you lose your cool the conversation can get away in a hurry.
- Don't compromise safety or the health of the team.
- Know your line in the sand. Know at what point it's time to use discipline to hold workers accountable.
 - Escalation is sometimes necessary but should be a last resort.
- In private conversations work best. Know your audience and the most effective way to communicate with the individual.

Q7 – How do you get your crews to perform safely and avoid risk when you're not present in the field?

- Lead by example. If you're not doing it, they aren't doing it.
- Follow through with what you're asking them to do. Be consistent.
- Constant reminders. Repetition is key.
- Demonstrate the work as well as care and concern + expectations. Create a culture of caring. Be personable and develop trust in that relationship. Gaining the respect of the crew! Treat as equals. Build a relationship. Coach before you tell.
- Inspect what you expect – catch the smaller things before they become bigger things. Demonstrate that it's important to you.
- Effective safety meetings – engaging the crews, asking questions, making it a discussion – have it be interactive and informative – lay out what they need to know with specificity and clarity. Put people on the spot. Smaller meetings versus large groups. More frequent. Toolbox talks relative to current projects. Oftentimes the “corporate” topics are not relevant in the moment. Ask everyone to come up with and present at a safety meeting – promotion of safety – safety incentives. Resolve discrepancies with safety policies to ensure that it doesn't become too loose – creates complacency. Lack of clarity and consistency is an issue.
- Recognize people that are bringing safety risks to the attention of their supervisor. Seek feedback from the crew. Ask what's working...what's not working. Help them identify common risks.
- Don't look the other way – it's easy to walk by. Coach on the spot. What you permit, you promote. Encourage “stop work” authority – if it doesn't look/feel right, it's usually not right. Ease the blow – ex. share something as lessons learned and encourage others to speak openly in AAR.
- Provide the field quality tools and equipment and ask them to report damage, deficiencies, etc.

Q8 – How do you remain present with employees even with conflicting priorities. (i.e., Schedule Pressure, Meeting etc.)

- Show up to the morning huddle and stretch and flex & being present.
 - Take break/lunch with the crews.
- Take the time to be with employees first thing in the morning.
- Remember that the crew are MOST IMPORTANT- create balance to be present.
- Check in with employees face to face- have the conversation with each employee.
- Check for PPE- hold them accountable for habitual lost items.
- Check for engagement.
- Ask employee “what do you need today?”
- Participate with crews when they are writing their PTP/JHA- ask them specific questions.
- When involved with the Pre-Task plan you can evaluate the situational awareness and mental check-in.

- Use time with employees to promote situational awareness.
- Make time to get to the field – WALK THE JOB and if leading foreman, communicate the importance of field time.
- Taking more ownership for look-ahead for future planning

Q9 – Innovation Topic- Discuss innovative methods, tools and how to implement innovation into work force.

- Resistance
 - People stuck in old ways.
 - Most were taught one way and will not deviate from them.
 - Being open to listening to others, especially younger people in the work force.
 - Folks that been in the trade longer believing they have all the knowledge.
 - Sometimes people in leadership roles are too arrogant to listen to people working under them.
 - The willingness to allow failure to find the successful tools/methods.
 - Taking the time to step back and listen to these suggestions.
- Necessity Breeds innovation.
 - Times that traditional methods/tools won't work. Forces those to think outside the box.
- Attempts to use new tools/methods.
 - Won't know how successful the use of other tools/methods can be without trying them.
 - Sometimes it takes tweaking of new suggestions to fit the need.
 - Might not be as fast as the 1st time used but may pay off in the long run.
- Other trades seem to have more opportunity for new innovative tools.
 - Electricians, LV groups, etc.