

Worker Health Awareness in the Workplace



MAIN FOCAL POINT

For people in general, including on the job, to be more alert to their co-workers not only physically but mentally. If there is ever a time to be more alert and mindful of others, it is now. So many changes in this past year have caused both physical, financial and mental strain in countless lives. We can never know the affects that all of this has had on individuals and on the family unit as a whole. COVID set some recommended guidelines to help bring Health and Safety to the surface in a new light.

Moving forward, we want to go back to "normal", but not lose some of the benefits obtained.

The past year...

The workplace saw many changes due to COVID. There were perceived Pros and Cons to each, based on the workplace, etc., but the end goal was to help slow the spread of the virus.

Some of the changes were specific to the virus spreading, and other changes were for health and safety practices we should continue to implement as we move forward.

You may ask, what does all of this have to do with worker health awareness? Just as there are Pros and Cons to changes mandated to Employers; there are Pros and Cons to the health and safety of each employee. We must be mindful of each other more than ever as we move forward.

Let's look at some of these changes and how it has affected and can affect us on an individual level.

Mask Wearing



Current guidelines still recommend unvaccinated individuals to wear a mask to protect them and others who are not vaccinated, including those with disabilities who are not able to get vaccinated or wear a mask.



It is hard to tell going forward what changes will occur with this guideline, but workers can stay alert to the needs of those who are wearing a mask.

Social/Physical Distancing



During the height of COVID, physical contact (handshaking, hugs) was discouraged among co-workers.



Going forward, be alert to how your co-workers respond if you reach out for a handshake; you can still use other methods, such as a smile or a kind word, to effectively greet co-workers.

Increased Hand Sanitizing and Hand Washing Practices



Most companies had additional areas/supplies set up for better sanitizing practices.



Based on the line of work, this can be good to keep, maybe even on a smaller scale, to help prevent workplace illness.

Work from home ...



It was a big change for some who had to start working from home; for others it was welcomed and exciting. Every individual life is different.

The transition back to the workplace can be hard.

It's important to show patience and be helpful to those in transition.

Be More Self-Aware of Our Health



Be more self-aware of our health, including but not limited to daily body temperature, general feeling of being "well", alert to early signs of illness.



COVID protocols brought more awareness to this part of our well-being.



Continue to make the effort for your health and also to set the example for co-workers.

A General Atmosphere of Concern for Our Co-Workers if They Became Ill or One of Their Close Family Members, Children, Etc.



We may not know specifically what someone else is going through, but if they share personal information, work towards the goal of being a positive and encouraging influence.

Becoming More Alert to Other Non-COVID Health and Safety Scenarios



More than ever before the workplace is filled with health and safety flags all the time.



Take what we have experienced the last year and make preventative and productive steps going forward.

NEW COMMUNICATION STANDARDS

If you do not have a shift or weekly schedule for team/worker meetings, this could be an opportunity to implement new communication standards for your company.

Adjust it to your work needs- some points can be effectively communicated in a 5-minute session at the start of a shift, while more extensive topics will need more time.

Try out different methods and see what type of session produces the results you need for your team of workers.

Let us look at a few ideas that can improve worker awareness in the workplace with a scheduled meeting.

Use these opportunities to "take time to be kind"-a little effort can go a long way.

A workplace culture may fail to develop without a sense of unity.



As you take time to greet employees personally at the start of their shift, you will start to learn more about your workers. You will have a picture of their daily health and well-being that can help determine how their shift will go- do they seem tired? Is a child/parent sick and they are carrying the load? Did they have transportation trouble getting to work that day? Are they excited about an accomplishment in their personal life? etc.



Learning about your employees on an individual basis will teach you how they communicate with others and how they can achieve in different areas of your workplace.



They may feel more comfortable to bring up questions or concerns if they are given an opportunity to express themselves in a pressure free environment as opposed to them trying to find you or flag you down when a problem comes up.



Make sure to set parameters, such as any concerns they present will be evaluated, but do not promise anything to be implemented so as not to bring false hopes or to cause them to lose trust in your leadership.



Take time to note responses to work tasks discussed or assigned. Some workers have a negative disposition naturally and may need extra encouragement-they just see it as the necessity to make a living and will do the task and go home. Take this into consideration, but also learn your limits on what kind of attention the worker will respond to. Others will respond more positively, and you may learn they show interest in expanding their roles in the company if presented with the opportunity.



Be careful to not show favoritism with workers in the same scenario, or do not be "buddy-buddy" with some and not others at your meetings. These are to be times with you as the leadership role representing the company and your workers. Do not let this be confused with acknowledging good habits and accomplishments that should be mentioned to encourage the workers and help morale. After acknowledging goals accomplished, you can use this to motivate for the next goals/tasks that need to be accomplished.



Learning your workers will also show you if discipline should be administered as a whole or if it would be more effective for you to discuss it privately with the employee. Weigh pros and cons from the company's point of view as well as the individual



If you expect your team members to be clear and concise with you, then be that to them. We have all heard the saying "Communication is Key!" and that holds a lot of truths.



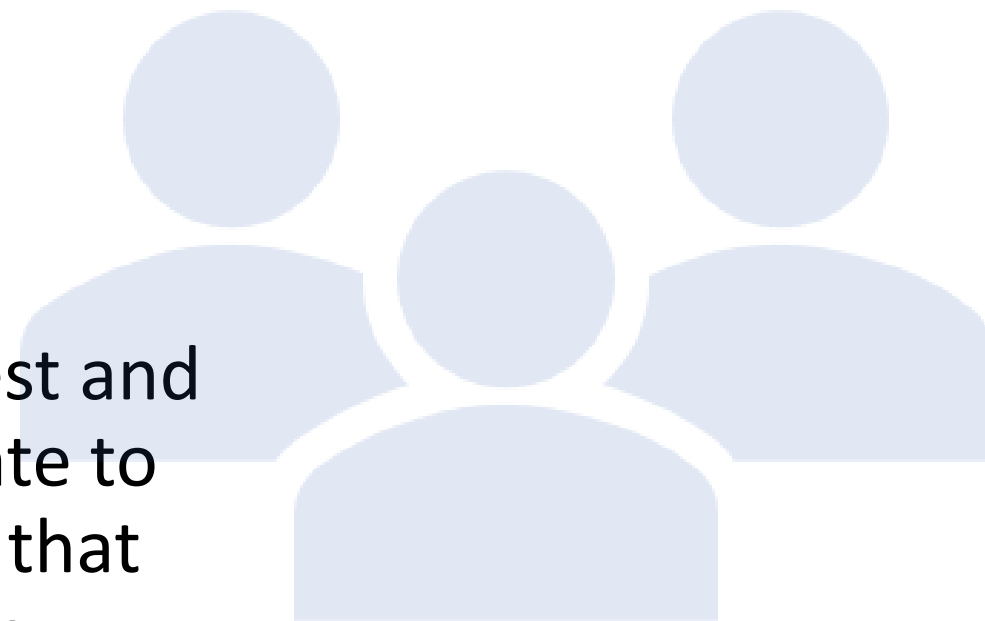
Be alert that managing/supervising employees may feel like "mowing the grass" - no matter how good you did it last week, the grass keeps growing and needs the same care over and over again. Try to practice turning to encouragement rather than discouragement within yourself. Repetition can help you and your team members learn!



Do your homework outside of the meeting and share in a common place (bulletin board, company internal websites) programs or activities that can help your workers (group outings, library events, free health screenings in the area, etc.). This can be a small touch to show you care and also create common ground for the employees that are from different backgrounds that participate in the programs.



Once you establish what is the best and most effective way to communicate to your staff, part of the goal will be that this will make the workplace more efficient and will create a stronger team of workers.





With opening the line of communications and being the example, let us look at other workplace situations where having worker awareness will be beneficial and the workers may be more apt to look out for each other and the company. (We will look at one example from common workplaces. Please adjust/apply to your specific industry.)

MANUFACTURING

Slips, trips, falls: Be alert to who is working in your area/on your shift. Help keep an eye out for things you know can be a daily hazard, such as if mopping an area or using a cord stretched out over different workspaces. Try to be the example of preventing accidents.

OFFICE

Difficult customer call: Be alert your co-worker may have elevated feelings after the call. Try to see they may not be upset with you, but the situation . Help take steps, if necessary, to alleviate their stress and frustration so they and the workflow can get back to normal.

CONSTRUCTION

Heat exhaustion/over exertion: Keep an eye out for other workers on the job site. Prepare ahead with aides to help if heat stress may occur in that location (cooling aides, bring extra water and electrolyte beverages, plan to work in cooler parts of the day). Encourage a worker showing signs of heat exhaustion to take precautions to prevent further injury and damage to their body.

FACTORY

Burn injuries: Become familiar with first aid supplies in your facility. If you see an employee struggling with a burn injury, alert one of your First Responders in the workplace to quickly aid the injured.

Objective

As we take more time to be aware of worker health in the workplace, over time you should see a positive effect.

COVID caused us to be more alert to mental and physical health situations, so we can use that as a launching point to continue looking at the workers themselves who essentially make up the company.

Some of these positive outcomes may be more team unity, more efficient better communication, better accountability/attendance, and an overall sense of belonging and higher morale.

Our jobs make up so much of our daily time and our lifetime. Starting positive changes and showing you care at work can help the individual for the time they are with the company and can even have the spillover effect to help them in their personal life.

"We don't need a title to lead. We just need to care. People would rather follow a leader with a heart than a leader with a title"

-Craig Groeschel