



Safety Culture

How to Use a 'Safety Moment' to Make Safety Resonate with Employees

Vanessa Jo Roberts | Mar 05, 2020

You've run the training programs; you've ensured that the business is meeting its compliance requirements; yet, you don't feel any closer to creating a safety culture. We look at how using safety moments might break through with your employees.

"What we see is people are going through the compliance and compulsory training, but then trying to figure out why their team is not acting or working safely."

That, Jim Schuster explains, is "where safety moments can be very powerful." Schuster is CEO of *Martin Technical*, a company that specializes in industrial safety and training.

They are powerful because they compel people to take note. "When people start talking about personal stories, people will stop and listen," he says. "They are engaged in listening to those stories."

"Talking about a code or standard gets processed by the head, but talking about something that happened to someone gets felt in the heart."

Jim Schuster
CEO, Martin Technical

The stories allow the safety team and managers to build on those moments, tie them to explicit work activities within the facility and return to them later to help keep messaging grounded in reality. Their use can bring the day to day to life and make it real in a way that most required training courses and materials do not, Schuster says.

That's why near misses always make for great safety moments, he says. "Workers get complacent in their jobs, and the hazards involved start to fade into the background. These personal stories of near misses or accidents can jolt them and make them reengage in their safety thinking."

What Is a Safety Moment?

A safety moment is a brief and typically informal discussion on a safety topic. It might take place during a team meeting with workers or before a shift.

Safety Moments Checklist: 4 Best Practices

Here's a cheat sheet you can use to help craft a series of safety moments based on the advice shared by Martin Technical CEO Jim Schuster.

Martin Technical visits hundreds of facilities each year. "We get to learn from everyone we meet and hear their personal stories, which is why we have so many stories to share," he says. "You can build your own stories by doing some research on accidents related to the equipment that you use or the tasks you perform, and then tell a story of what happened to a particular person."

Make sure each safety moment is:

- **Relevant:** It will affect the behaviors of the people you're speaking to.
- **Applicable:** It's about the work, projects and operations of the business.
- **Short:** It can be told in just a few minutes.
- **Personal:** It builds on a real-world story that is revealed.

"It's not about signage or personal protective equipment, it's about short messages that hit people quickly and resonate with them," Schuster says.

What's unique for Martin Technical is that its work with hundreds of industrial businesses each year means its safety experts and training staff hear a lot of stories about near misses and incidents from the people they advise and train.

It happens naturally when people are talking informally, but Schuster also encourages his employees to seek out these personal stories.

Are you ready should OSHA come knocking? Find out in "OSHA: What to Expect When You're Inspected."

"If you're doing formal training, always ask has anyone ever experienced something like the accidents or near misses related to the training topic," Schuster says. While these may not necessarily be obvious safety moments, they might provide the kernels that can be used to create them.

"Sometimes people talk about their dads or brothers or other relatives when they share these personal stories," and you can see a shift in how everyone responds to that information emotionally, he says.

"As a safety leader, you need to pull these stories from your staff and tap into the different voices" that make these moments individual and distinct from standardized training materials, Schuster says.

Jim Schuster's Own Personal Safety Moment and an Unexpected Topic

"One personal experience I have made into a safety moment is a time I decided to step over some stacked wood for a shortcut. On the other side of the stack that I couldn't see was a pipe that rolled when I stepped on it, and I went down pretty hard.

"Conveyor accidents are another good topic because conveyors are often overlooked as nonthreatening. But when you bring a personal story in, people look at it in a different way.

"I've got several stories of workers reaching over a conveyor and getting part of their clothing or a finger caught in the conveyor rollers and then it just pulls them in. Frequently, it's not the hand that's doing the work and where the focus is, but the support hand where you aren't paying attention."

—Jim Schuster is CEO of Martin Technical, a company that specializes in industrial safety and training.

Safety is a habit or behavior, not an activity to be practiced when a dangerous situation occurs. To build these habits or behaviors takes repetition and reminders on a daily or weekly basis, he says. "Safety moments are part of this demonstration and repetition that helps build a safety culture."

Read how a new business shaped its approach to safety from the get-go in our "Q&A with rPlanet Earth: How to Develop a Safety Culture in a Startup."

How Do You Make Your Safety Moment Matter?

Safety moments need to be relevant, applicable, short and personal, Schuster says.

Why a Safety Moment Must Be Relevant

It's critical that the content be something that each person in a meeting or standup can visualize themselves being a part of. It's that aspect of a safety moment that gets your employees to stop and think, he says.

Why a Safety Moment Must Be Applicable

"If the content really doesn't apply to their jobs, they are going to tune out quickly, and if that becomes repetitive, then you are setting the wrong behavior," Schuster explains.

Why a Safety Moment Must Be Short

Brevity is key to holding their attention. If it goes too long, they will—again—start to tune out, he says.

Why a Safety Moment Must Be Personal

Perhaps the most critical element is that every safety moment must be personal.

The more you can bring the true-life aspects and voice of the person who experienced the event into the moment, “the bigger impact it will have,” Schuster says. “Talking about a code or standard gets processed by the head, but talking about something that happened to someone gets felt in the heart.”

If a safety team can bring personal connections and emotions into training, employees will relate to what is being discussed, they will see how it could affect their world, and they will remember it and take it more seriously, he says.

“Long training classes are required and valuable, but when you break things down into smaller bite-sized pieces, there is a better retention rate,” Schuster says. “That’s why there is such a big focus in the market today for micro-learning content.”

Share how your business successfully uses safety moments to help build safety culture.

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