Federal Safety Commissioner's Leaders in Safety

A guide to developing senior management safety behaviours in the building and construction industry

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

Leaders can create and change cultures. Leaders can do this by paying attention in a systematic manner to the culture they are seeking to establish. The *Federal Safety*

Commissioner's Safety Principles and Guidance encourage all participants in the building and construction industry to strive for a higher level of safety. The Principles identify senior management commitment as a key step in achieving a safety culture. By paying particular attention to safety, senior managers have the capacity to act as leaders in improving occupational health and safety (OHS) outcomes in the building and construction industry.

This guide is designed to assist senior managers in building and construction companies to demonstrate a tangible commitment to OHS. It is advisory only and industry participants are encouraged to develop their own innovative approaches to demonstrating their commitment to OHS and thereby improving their safety performance. This guide provides practical guidance on how construction companies can develop the senior management actions and behaviours that communicate a genuine commitment to safety. It is this perception of whether the senior management is 'fair dinkum' about safety which influences the workforce's own behaviour and decisions regarding safety.

The guide will be useful for those individuals who are:

- seeking assistance to help senior management to show greater safety leadership;
- responsible for the development of OHS initiatives;
- interested in improving the organisation's safety culture; and
- seeking guidance as to how they themselves can demonstrate greater commitment to safety.

Five steps are identified that form the basis of any approach to the development of senior management safety behaviours. These five steps are:

Step one

Understand how behaviour works.

Step two

Define what behaviour you want senior managers to demonstrate.

Step three

Start influencing, developing and supporting senior management attitudes and beliefs.

Step four

Develop and ensure senior managers' ability and opportunity to undertake safety behaviours.

Step five

Build an environment that supports and encourages senior management safety behaviours.

Executive Summary

Senior management safety behaviours are vital for creating a work and organisational environment where OHS risks are minimised. The most important senior management behaviours relate to their allocation of resources (including their own time); communications regarding the value of safety; and their leadership behaviours in the safety context.

The model presented in this guide provides a platform from which to approach the development of initiatives designed to increase the occurrence and quality of senior management safety behaviours. To maximise the likelihood of behavioural change, it is important to undertake the following steps:

Steps	Actions
1. Understand how behaviour works.	Understand that behaviour is a result of a number of factors and understand how each factor must be accounted for in behaviour change activities.
2. Define what behaviour you want senior managers to undertake.	Be specific and detailed as to what is required in various contexts.
3. Start influencing, developing and supporting senior management attitudes and beliefs.	Challenge beliefs so that senior managers become open to change and reward the new safety behaviours so that attitudes begin to change.
4. Develop and ensure senior managers' ability and opportunity to undertake safety behaviours.	Ensure they have the knowledge, skills and understanding required to undertake the behaviours effectively; and give them a context in which to undertake behaviours.
5. Build an environment that supports and encourages senior management safety behaviours.	Build a strong senior manager group so that individuals feel accountable to their peers for the effective completion of safety behaviours.

Step 1 - Understand how behaviour works

Although it can be hard to understand and predict, the reason people undertake particular behaviours is a result of a number of key factors, including the view or position of their manager. Understanding what these factors are and how they interact to produce behaviour can help you to be more targeted and strategic in your senior manager behaviour.

Fundamentally, people choose which behaviour they undertake as a result of:

- their beliefs and attitudes towards the behaviour (as discussed in step 3);
- whether they feel that they are capable of undertaking the behaviour (as discussed in step 4); and
- their perception of what people will think of them undertaking the behaviour (as discussed in step 5).

Each of these three factors contributes towards a person's decision to undertake the behaviour. As a consequence, when seeking to influence and change a person's behaviour, an organisation *must* address all three factors to maximise the likelihood of success.

However, the very first step that organisations should take is to identify the specific behaviours they are trying to achieve (step 2). Following this, activities targeting the three elements above will ensure that the mechanisms (systems, resources, plans etc) are in place to influence, motivate and support the new behaviour (steps 3 to 5).

Step 2 - Define what behaviour you want senior managers to demonstrate

To change and develop senior managers' safety behaviours it is vital to have a clear understanding of what you are trying to achieve. **Organisations could use the following behaviours to develop their safety initiatives**. Organisations are also encouraged to develop their own initiatives. Organisations are also encouraged to develop their own initiatives.

The following behaviours allow senior managers to demonstrate their commitment to safety:

Behaviour	Practical Application
1. Provide appropriate resources (time, money and people) to manage safety.	a. Safety policies are developed using consultation and are adhered to. b. Safety-related programmes—such as effective and high-quality training—are undertaken and supported. c. Enough staff are employed in the company so that it is possible to manage safety as well as productivity.
2. Set safety, health and welfare as a high-status organisational value.	a. Formal and informal communication promotes and validates safety. b. Supportive and trusting relationships are formed with staff. c. Stated values are adhered to, consistently communicated, clarified and reinforced.
3. Allocate own work time to safety management activities.	a) Visible safety tasks and responsibilities are assigned and undertaken by senior management.
4. Provide leadership.	a) Concern for individuals (via mentoring, coaching and through supportive behaviours) is shown and communicated. b) Intellectual stimulation is provided (challenging, inspiring and encouraging people to think about things in different ways and engage mentally with issues). **c)** Motivation and energy is provided to situations and a vision or plan is effectively communicated (charisma).

See the case study excerpts below for examples of senior management undertaking these safety behaviours.

Case study excerpts

Case study excerpt 1

The allocation of resources to OHS communicates a powerful message to staff and subcontractors regarding the commitment of senior management. To show this commitment, a large Australian construction company has developed a joint Certificate IV in OHS and Line Management that it offers to its line managers, including subcontractor supervisors. This qualification seeks to integrate OHS into good management practices and meets the national competencies specified for both a Certificate IV in Business (Frontline Management) and Occupational Health and Safety. The company intends in the long term to make the Certificate IV a tender pre-qualification requirement for subcontractors, thus driving OHS performance in its workforce and subcontracting workforce and showing that the organisation is committed to safety.

Key learning: The allocation of resources to provide useful, practical and recognised

OHS training to staff and subcontractors communicates a powerful message that the organisation is committing to safety (as in point 1 on page 7).

Case study excerpt 2

Another example of displaying commitment to safety via resource allocation can be seen with an organisation's initiative to develop site managers to have a role as OHS consultants and ambassadors. In this initiative, site managers are trained and developed to act as an advisor across a number of construction projects. This position is rotated every three months. This has three benefits:

- The significant cost involved in the programme communicates to staff that senior management value safety.
- Site managers are highly experienced in the construction process, so with effective OHS training and development, these people can be influential OHS advisors.
- After finishing a period as an advisor, these site managers are more likely to drive OHS performance on their future projects.

Key learning: Allocating resources so that staff are given training and experience can be a powerful mechanism for changing safety behaviour in the organisation

(as in point 1.b on page 7).

Case study excerpt 3

Formal and informal communication regarding OHS is very important for directing the behaviour of staff and subcontractors. To achieve this effective communication, a large Australian construction company has ensured that all its management systems have incorporated strong OHS values and are written and communicated in a manner that is accessible to all staff, as seen in business management manuals, visual symbols and objects and communications initiated by the Managing Director (MD) or Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The MD or CEO further drives organisational safety values and accountabilities by asking senior management during meetings to indicate how they have displayed their commitment to safety.

An example of this would be a directive to 'do what we say we will do'.

Key learning: Ensure that the organisation's OHS values are clearly and frequently communicated to all those involved with the company. Also, ensure that those values indicate what behaviour is expected of all staff (as in point 2 on page 5).

What can you do to influence senior management behavioural change?

The first step in changing behaviour is to communicate to senior managers what behaviour is expected of them. This can be achieved through a number of means including:

Selection procedures

- In interviews, talk about the expected behaviours and explore whether the candidate is willing and capable of undertaking the required behaviours.
- Only select those candidates who are willing and capable.

Company inductions

- During orientations, inform senior managers of the behaviour that is required.

Job descriptions, performance appraisals and feedback

- Assess senior managers on the expected behaviour and provide performance feedback
- on what they are doing well and what can/needs to be improved.
- Use employee surveys to assess the perception of senior management commitment to safety.

Performance and professional development

- Reward and recognise those managers who undertake the required behaviours.
- Encourage and support the development of OHS initiatives.

How can you display your commitment to safety?

Employees will evaluate your commitment to safety (and therefore how important safety is to them) by what you say and do. An option to improve your commitment is to identify the specific context in which you need to display commitment and the specific behaviours that should be undertaken in that given context.

To aid in this process, a very useful guide has been developed by the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Construction Innovation. To obtain a copy of *A Construction Safety Competency Framework—Improving OHS Productivity and Maintaining a Safety Culture* see www.construction-innovation.info.

The framework lists the tasks that senior management (among other positions) should be competent to complete and the behaviour/s that should be exhibited during the effective completion of each task. These critical senior management safety tasks are listed below:

- Challenge unsafe behaviour/attitude at any level when you encounter it.
- Work with subordinates to solve safety problems.
- Initiate and coordinate OHS awareness activities or presentations.
- Consult on and resolve OHS issues.
- Make site visits where you talk directly to a site worker about safety in the workplace.
- Speak to other senior managers about safety issues in the workplace.
- Recruit and select new staff who are competent to maintain a safety culture.
- Develop project safety management plans.
- Identify and include suitable OHS requirements into subcontractor packages, for example risk assessment tools.
- Understand and apply regulatory OHS requirements.
- Apply full working knowledge of your organisation's Safety Management System.

These tasks were identified as leading to a positive safety culture when completed effectively by senior management. The CRC competency framework lists how these tasks should be completed to achieve effective safety outcomes. Please refer to the full document, as the information is too detailed for this guide.

Before examining the CRC competency framework, you need to first examine the above list of activities and evaluate your actions in terms of:

- the allocation of your own time and resources to the completion of these tasks:
    - How involved are you in safety?
    - How many of these tasks do you undertake?
    - What does your level of involvement say about your level of commitment?

- your understanding of these tasks (knowledge and skills):
    - Do you know how to complete the above tasks so that you achieve real outcomes?

- the messages you communicate to others by the way you complete the above tasks:
    - What are the underlying OHS messages you send when you make site visits, inspections etc?
    - What do you say about safety when completing these tasks?

- your leadership style when completing the above tasks:
    - Are you fostering engagement, empowerment and ownership of OHS among your staff?

Step 3 - Start influencing and developing senior management attitudes and beliefs

Attitudes are the 'engine' of behaviour in that they serve to motivate and direct what people say and do. Attitudes are an appraisal of a particular behaviour as being either positive or negative (good or bad). People form attitudes from the broader beliefs that they have, for example:

Broad belief

Accidents are a normal part of construction and can't be avoided

Specific attitude

Spending time and money on safety is a waste of time

By developing broader safety beliefs and specific behavioural attitudes, organisations are better placed to drive senior management safety behaviour. Research has identified that the following beliefs lead to positive safety attitudes and behaviour:

Existing Broad Belief	Specific Attitude Created
Commitment to safety	• Belief that the health and wellbeing of workers should be protected • Belief in the need to be involved in safety management • Belief in the need to communicate directly with the workforce • Belief in the need for pro-activity
Non-fatalism	• Belief that 'accidents' are avoidable • Belief that 'accidents' do not happen only by chance or through 'bad luck' • Belief that things can be done to prevent 'accidents' occurring
Worry and emotional reaction to accidents	• Belief that emotional and personal stress will occur if accidents happen • Belief that accidents will have a negative impact on self, either through guilt or even through a negative impact on job performance
Risk awareness	• Belief that serious problems will arise if accidents occur • Belief that near misses are serious and significant events • Belief that the regular occurrence of small accidents indicates the likelihood of a large event happening

How can attitudes and beliefs change?

It is never an easy task to change an individual's long-held beliefs and attitudes, but it is possible to change them with the right level of experiences, reward/affirmation and self-reflection. Organisations should have the following approach to the development of safety attitudes and beliefs.

Approach: Create doubt in senior managers' minds regarding the validity and appropriateness of certain beliefs and reward the new behaviour to change the old attitude.

Element 1 - Create doubt

One key element of this approach is for senior managers to become aware of the various beliefs they hold and how they relate to decisions and behaviours they make regarding safety. Through a process of questioning and reflection, these beliefs should be challenged as to whether they are accurate or appropriate for the construction industry of the present and future. An effective means of achieving this is through facilitated small group workshops.

The ultimate goal of this element is to create enough doubt in individuals' minds so that they are open to begin to undertake the required behaviours and to recognise the reward to be gained through the completion of safety behaviours.

Element 2 - Reward new behaviour

Organisations should require that senior managers undertake the safety behaviours and ensure that they 'perceive' a positive outcome to have occurred when they undertake the behaviour (particularly in the early stages). This reward may be as simple as MD/CEO or peer acknowledgement.

This direct feedback link between safety and reward is vital but may be difficult to achieve if the senior manager is 'distant' from OHS outcomes. Hence, it is important to provide senior management with feedback that shows the immediate link between their safety leadership and the effect it has on employee safety. Some feedback mechanisms include:

- workplace/site inspections and discussions with those who are affected by senior management safety decisions; and
- changes in employees' perception of senior management commitment to safety (as gathered via regular employee survey)—long-term feedback.

When individuals perceive that a positive outcome has occurred, they begin to undertake the behaviour more frequently and as a result, re-adjust their attitudes to be in line with and support their behaviour. After these new attitudes are formed, the need to frequently reward the behaviour reduces, with only occasional reward required to maintain the new attitude and behaviour.

To summarise, attitudes and beliefs play a very important part in determining senior manager safety behaviours. These attitudes and beliefs can be influenced by ensuring that existing beliefs are challenged to the extent that senior managers become open to new ways of doing things; and that safety behaviours are rewarded extensively in the early phase of the initiative.

What can you do to start changing your own beliefs and attitudes?

Your first step is to understand what your safety beliefs and attitudes are and then challenge and question the beliefs that prevent you from being fully committed to safety.

To achieve this, examine your safety behaviours. Again, look at the list of senior management safety tasks presented in step 2 on page 7 and think of the last time you were involved in the completion of these tasks. Now, think of the way you behaved and the decisions you made—what do these behaviours say about your beliefs?

As an example of this process:

Task

Make site visits where you talk directly to site workers about safety in the workplace.

Steps

1. Think of the last time you were on-site.
2. Did you notice anything unsafe?
   - Did you even look for or ask about OHS issues?
3. Did you do anything about the OHS issues that you saw?
   - Did you speak to anyone about the problem?
   - Did you challenge unsafe attitudes and beliefs in others?
   - Did you identify if further support or resources were required to manage OHS?
   - Did you follow up to check if any changes had been made?
4. Do you feel as though you did everything you should have to show that you are committed to safety?
5. If you did not do everything you could have, what beliefs (from step 3 on page 11) do you think stopped you from doing all that was necessary?
   - How accurate and appropriate are these beliefs?

By questioning and reflecting on your own beliefs and attitudes regarding safety you are allowing yourself to begin to behave in new ways that will demonstrate a true commitment to safety. You should follow these reflective steps both before and after completing the various safety management tasks. If you find that you have significant resistance to undertaking any of the new behaviours, you need to stop, analyse and question what beliefs and attitudes are preventing you from undertaking what is required.

Step 4 - Develop and ensure senior managers' ability and opportunity to undertake safety behaviours

The fourth step in this behaviour change model is to develop the senior managers' confidence in their ability to undertake the required behaviour. The ultimate goal of this step is to ensure that senior managers are not prevented from undertaking the required behaviours effectively because they believe that they are not able to, or there is no opportunity to display safety behaviours.

When designing behaviour change programmes, companies should ensure that their senior managers are:

1. capable of undertaking the desired behaviour (have the right skills and knowledge);
2. given an environment in which they can undertake the behaviour; and
3. recognised and rewarded for showing others that it is possible to undertake the expected behaviour.

For senior managers, the appropriate environment may include exposure to and involvement in safety management processes—that is, they are given responsibility to make safety specific decisions—thus providing the opportunity for management to show safety leadership behaviours and shape the safety culture.

How can you develop senior management confidence and ability?

As mentioned earlier, it is important that senior managers are given:

- the understanding of why they need to undertake the behaviours;
- the knowledge required to undertake the behaviours;
- the skills required to undertake the behaviour; and
- the opportunity and environment in which to undertake the behaviours.

The main mechanism through which to achieve these aims is training and development.

Training programmes should focus on giving individuals an understanding of exactly what they should be doing; how it relates to key objectives; and why it is important for them to do it. The development activities should focus on providing the opportunity to undertake the behaviours as well as feedback and support for the senior managers as they develop their skills (via coaching and mentoring).

See the following case study excerpts for examples of initiatives which increase the ability and opportunity for senior managers in undertaking safety behaviours.

Case study excerpts

Case study excerpt 4

To develop the capability of management staff, one company has engaged in a staff development programme. This programme has identified the activities that management (including the CEO/MD and other senior managers) must be capable of undertaking. These competency requirements are integrated in the management system and clearly articulate to all staff the specific behaviour which is expected of them. To achieve these behavioural expectations, staff are given training and development via a nationally accredited Certificate IV in Workplace Safety Leadership. This programme has sought to provide:

- the knowledge and understanding required to be effective leaders (including why it is important to behave in particular ways); and

- the procedural knowledge/technical skills required to complete the tasks effectively so that they achieve the required behaviours in others.

Key learning: Training and development should be given to all staff (including senior management) to ensure that they are capable of undertaking safety leadership behaviours and that they have the knowledge and understanding required to build ownership and involvement (as in point 1 on page 5).

Case study excerpt 5

As a way of ensuring that senior management are given the context in which to provide safety leadership, several companies have required their managers to set goals regarding their involvement in various OHS activities. In these companies, management are asked to specify how frequently they will be involved in activities such as:

- site visits with safety as the only concern

- safety committees

- incident investigations

- tool box meetings

- project safety assessments.

Business units are then audited to ensure that staff are meeting their involvement goals. These involvement programmes have several benefits including:

- greater management awareness of OHS issues on-site;

- greater opportunity to show commitment to safety and communicate organisational values;

- greater opportunity to develop positive safety beliefs and attitudes among management; and

- gradual shifting of OHS responsibilities away from safety professionals to line management.

Key learning: Ensure that senior management are given responsibility and accountability to be involved in OHS activities. Encourage this involvement to be self-directed (personal goal-setting allowing for increased ownership), while still holding staff accountable to achieve their goals (as in point 2 on page 5).

What can you do to address this step?

You first need to ensure that you understand what behaviour is expected and to what standard. This may be achieved through actions completed as part of Step 2 and/or via the CRC competency framework.

You then need to work with others to assess your own capability and identify areas in which you could improve—this can be achieved via self-reflection and feedback from honest sources. Working with someone who will hold you accountable, develop and carry out a plan for how you are going to improve the new skills that you require.

Finally, you must also seek opportunities to be involved in the safety management process. You can only communicate a commitment to safety if you are seen to be doing something about it. Practice will also make perfect. The more you are involved in safety (with feedback and reflection mechanisms in place) the more effective you will be as a safety leader.

Step 5 - Build an environment that supports and encourages senior management safety behaviours

By nature, people are social and group-based beings. As a consequence, to function within a group, an individual's behaviour must be tolerated and accepted by the group. 'The group' is made up of people who are important to the individual—this may be many people (for example, the community) or it could be only a few people (friends). Hence, the ultimate goal of this step is to ensure that a senior manager's social group, particularly in the workplace, affirms and recognises safety behaviours as being positive.

How do you build a supportive social environment in the workplace?

The desired social environment can be created partly through the manner in which initiatives are undertaken. An outcome that should be kept in mind when developing all initiatives is to build strong relationships and links between workgroup members (in this case senior managers) so that a supportive group forms. A successful outcome would occur when an individual senior manager feels accountable to his/her immediate work group for the completion of safety behaviours. This sense of accountability will only occur if he/she feels 'part' of the group and the group values safety behaviours.

To achieve this kind of group environment, organisations need to conduct the majority of their development and behaviour change activities in the context of a workgroup. That is, organisations should undertake:

- group-based goal-setting;
- group-based training and development;
- group-based performance specification, appraisal and feedback;
- group-based reward and recognition;
- group-based support; and
- group-based relationship building.

By developing senior managers within a workgroup context, you are increasing the likelihood that a supportive group will form with safety as a value. The relationships formed within this group then create a sense of accountability in the individual to adhere to the group's expectations regarding safety behaviours.

What can you do to build a strong supportive environment?

Firstly, as a member of the senior management team, you have a role to develop a sense of team accountability for senior management safety behaviours. To achieve this sense of accountability you need to encourage and support the formation of links and relationships among the senior management team. This can be achieved by senior managers encouraging their staff to share information and experiences (for example, informally at the beginning of meetings).

Secondly, you need to be and keep others accountable to agreed safety actions and behaviours. This can be achieved through activities such as a requirement to state at senior management meetings how you have displayed your commitment to safety (as in case study excerpt 3). You should also look for ways to support, reward and recognise your colleagues.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although improving OHS is a shared responsibility, the demonstrated commitment of senior managers, as identified in the *Federal Safety Commissioner's Safety Principles and Guidance*, is vital to improving OHS. Therefore, this guide will assist senior managers in committing to, and demonstrating, the leadership needed to drive cultural change necessary to realise sustained improvements in OHS in the Australian building and construction industry. The FSC encourages all industry participants to be leaders in OHS, by developing their own innovative commitments to safety.

Further information

This guide is intended to be read in conjunction with the Federal Safety Commissioner's Safety Principles & Guidance. These are available from the Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner.

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