
Safety Lectures vs. Safety Conversations

We've been in the field and have heard "safety talks." They are usually one employee, more than likely the boss, screaming at another employee because something unsafe was witnessed. One gem that's been heard often on a jobsite is "If you fall off that ladder, before you hit the ground, you're fired!" Really?!

Both of these examples are safety *lectures*. One person talks *at* another person about what they were doing wrong and drones on and on and on until their throat is sore. For the person being talked *to*, their eyes have glossed over and they tuned out the "talker" within the first 15 seconds.

Over the last couple of years there has been a big push to have safety *conversations* rather than *lectures*; where two people actually *converse with one another*. They don't have to be long, drawn out conversations; they can be handled with six simple questions. When you witness someone who you think is performing an unsafe act, ask the following:

1. Tell me about your task.
2. What could go wrong?
3. How could you get hurt? What if?
4. How serious could that be?
5. Who else could be affected?
6. What could you do to do this safer?

Once you're done with the conversation, get an agreement and when they tell you what they are going to do to be safer, repeat back to them exactly what they said they were going to do. Here's the kicker . . . as soon as the agreement is made, tell the person that you're having the conversation with, "if you see me doing the same thing, please stop me and remind me of what I need to do."

So what's the expectation with the person you have a conversation with? The expectation is that anytime you see ANYONE performing an unsafe act, you have this conversation. All employees should feel empowered to have the conversation. I shouldn't matter if it's a brand new employee starting the conversation with an employee who has been with the company for 15 years or visa-versa. What matters is that everything is stopped and the conversation takes place. Even if the experienced employee points out during the course of the conversation that the way the task was being done is really the safest way to do the job. The new employee gets valuable training and the experienced employee knows that the new employee is going to make sure that everyone on the jobsite is going to go home the same way they came to work.

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