

# Safety Leadership and the Supportive Manager

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## Contents

Introduction .....	1
Why focus on managers?.....	1
What is management leadership in health and safety? .....	1
How does a supportive leader behave and demonstrate safety leadership?.....	1
Ideas for applying safety leadership in your workplace .....	3
Safety on the team agenda.....	4
Safety on the Management Team Agenda .....	5
Substantiating safety leadership.....	5
Further Information .....	5

## Introduction

The role of the manager is critical in maintaining and improving workplace safety. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on what can constitute effective safety leadership. The document can be used for training or setting DeakinAchieve goals.

## Why focus on managers?

Who you report to makes more of a difference than where you work. Culture is transmitted by what managers **do**, not what they say. If managers and supervisors are committed to workplace safety, even in “safe” workplaces:

- safe working practices will be taken seriously and applied consistently
- hazards will be reported and action taken before injuries occur
- people will feel safe to take ownership for mistakes and errors and use them to learn from
- a reserve of “trust” will be built between managers and staff that will make future problem solving easier and promote a less sceptical approach to workplace change and innovation.

## What is management leadership in health and safety?

Managers demonstrate leadership by providing the resources, motivation, priorities, and accountability for ensuring the safety and health of their team. This leadership involves setting up systems to ensure continuous improvement and maintaining a health and safety focus while attending to operational concerns. Effective managers understand the value in creating and fostering a strong safety culture within their organisation.

Safety should become a value of your work team as opposed to something that must be done or complied with. Integrating health, wellbeing and safety into the everyday management, just like other operational matters, budgeting, quality control, and marketing allows for a proactive approach to accident prevention and demonstrates the importance of working safely to the entire organisation.

## How does a supportive leader behave and demonstrate safety leadership?

The following are key supportive manager behaviours:

## Safety Leadership and the Supportive Manager

Characteristics	OHS Application
<p><b>Engages in two-way communication with their staff</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shares information</li> <li>• Asks employee’s opinions</li> <li>• Is inquisitive</li> <li>• Has frequent face to face meetings</li> <li>• Gives regular feedback</li> <li>• Encourage workers to voice concerns and make suggestions – and actively listens!</li> <li>• Encourage workers to participate in decision-making</li> </ul>	<p><b>Consults with their staff on OHS matters</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shares information about workplace hazards</li> <li>• Explain safety expectations and verifies understanding</li> <li>• Staff are asked to talk about what has gone well before the discussion moves on to problems</li> <li>• Talks to staff about their work and seeks opinions on how to address hazards or improve workplace health and safety</li> <li>• Carries out both formal and informal workplace walk-arounds and inspections and uses these as a way of meeting with staff in their own workplace</li> <li>• Does not ignore or gloss over unsafe practices or processes</li> <li>• Asks for input from staff before making decisions that affect their work or their work environment</li> </ul>
<p><b>Provides constructive feedback</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition for a job well done</li> <li>• Expresses confidence in employee’s ability to do their job well</li> <li>• Gives feedback on a regular basis</li> <li>• Makes their expectations clear</li> </ul>	<p><b>Promotes workplace safety and “walks the talk”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognises and reinforces good safety practices</li> <li>• Sets standards fairly and respects those standards</li> <li>• Provides honest , non-confrontational and interactive feedback about poor or inappropriate practices</li> <li>• Follows up agreements or commitments regarding improved practices or behaviours</li> <li>• Issues are anticipated and avoided by cultivating an atmosphere of safety first and openness</li> <li>• Seeks staff feedback if there are differences between “what the procedure” says and what is actually being done</li> <li>• Respects staff feedback on safety issues and tries to get agreement on practical improvements</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mentors their employees</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilises employee’s abilities</li> <li>• Supports the employee with higher ups</li> <li>• Encourages independent work</li> <li>• Helps employee learn from their mistakes</li> </ul>	<p><b>Builds local OHS skills and awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourages mindfulness with a mature and practical approach to risk awareness</li> <li>• Recognises the knowledge and skills of local safety leaders including supervisors and OHS representatives</li> <li>• Actively identifies and understands the limits of individual staff training and knowledge</li> <li>• Recognises situations that can lead to injury and intervenes with staff in a measured way</li> <li>• Helps staff to recognise, accept and resolve mistakes in a way that encourages personal development and learning</li> <li>• Takes personal responsibility for resolving issues without resorting to blaming or making a scapegoat of others</li> <li>• Resolves issues openly and directly with colleagues and staff without point-scoring</li> </ul>
<p><b>Allows their employees autonomy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourages employees to make decisions on their own</li> <li>• Lets employees do the work from start to finish</li> </ul>	<p><b>Promotes personal responsibility for safety</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourages an atmosphere of trust where mistakes and misjudgements are disclosed, understood and learnt from</li> <li>• Does not enforce impractical “safety rules” but works with staff to identify safe and practical work methods</li> </ul>

## Safety Leadership and the Supportive Manager

Characteristics	OHS Application
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognises employees have a life outside work</li> <li>Makes it easy for employees to rearrange their job schedule within operational requirements</li> <li>Allows employees to take advantage of flexible work arrangements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourages staff to identify workplace hazards and take personal responsibility for their resolution</li> <li>Assists staff to find an effective balance between personal/family demands and work demands</li> <li>Recognises workplace stress and workplace conflict and works with staff to identify causes and find solutions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Is perceived as fair and respectful</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrate fairness in management style, and application of policies</li> <li>Minimises “perks” based on hierarchy</li> </ul>	<p><b>Promotes equity and fairness in the workplace as a right</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personally demonstrates that safety rules apply to everyone including you</li> <li>Staff and their safety concerns are treated with respect</li> </ul>
<p><b>Facilitates completion of job tasks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Makes sure employees have the tools/equipment/training that they need to do their job</li> <li>Effectively plans work</li> <li>Encourages employees to undertake training needed to do their job</li> <li>Is available to answer questions</li> <li>Cares about the way the job is done not just the output</li> </ul>	<p><b>Facilitates the safe completion of job tasks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Makes sure risk assessments are carried out for hazardous work</li> <li>Recognises and manages risk in the workplace</li> <li>Promotes and educates staff on a practical approach to managing risk</li> <li>Responds respectfully and effectively to staff concerns and perceptions about risk</li> <li>Encourages local issue identification and resolution</li> </ul>

### Ideas for applying safety leadership in your workplace

For most managers safety is not a matter of “life and death”, or seemingly critical to the running of your operations, but none the less safety leadership creates a foundation of trust and respect that is essential to a harmonious and productive workplace as well as a safe one. The following are some ideas that can be used to move from a simple compliance view of safety towards a real commitment to a healthy and safe workplace. Since it is a long list, you may want to choose a few initially:

- Review the OHS risks you and your staff are exposed to (check your local OHS Risk Register), understand how they should be managed and review whether this is being done effectively in your workplace
- Developing a personal story about engaging with safety and sharing that story. Why does safety matter to you?
- Model and reinforce safety values
- Asks “why?” rather than who when dealing with safety issues
- Participate in workplace inspections and use it as a way to connect with staff
- Put safety on the team agenda. Encourage team members to contribute improvement ideas not just a list of “problems”
- Consult with staff or changes or issues that may affect their OHS
- Check progress of any health wellbeing and safety Action Plans or initiatives
- Where issues are raised, try to get the team involved in the resolution process

## Safety Leadership and the Supportive Manager

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- Look at health and well being activities for the team, use the development of a health and well being program (even a small one) as a team exercise
- Investigate workplace accidents and hazards and try to identify and then address contributing factors
- Participate in or help provide training to your staff
- Track safety and health performance
- Use OHS inspections to check the relevance and compliance with critical work procedures
- Set targets and allocate responsibilities and resources to carry out risk assessments (identify, assess and fix hazards)
- For serious OHS issues or accidents, or major changes in the workplace put together safety action teams to develop new procedures and processes
- Ensure safety knowledge is passed effectively to new staff through induction processes, training and buddy systems
- Verify safety practices and knowledge by talking to staff
- Document difficult conversations, monitor ongoing behaviour / performance and follow up on arrangements that have been out in place
- Use Job Safety Analysis and Safe Working Method Statements to document safe practices and use for training
- Seek to monitor the psychological health of your team (e.g. stress, level of conflict, workload)
- Take prompt action to address or intervene early with psychological stress issues
- For high risk processes or practices verify safety by using safety observers and trial runs
- Appoint designated safety personnel such as emergency wardens, first aid officers, local safety coordinators
- Support designated safety personnel by allowing time for OHS duties and training, accommodating emergency evacuation drills etc.

### Safety on the team agenda

Sometimes safety is seen as a “party-stopper”. It can seem as if you are the only one who is interested. Therefore it is important to make safety a team priority. This can be done in many ways:

- Identify and recognise success:
  - Are staff recognising and taking action to resolve workplace hazards?
  - Is potentially hazardous work being well managed?
  - Are staff actively discussing safety or taking action to improve safety or the welfare of their colleagues?
- Have there been any injuries since the last meeting. If so, what is being done to prevent their re-occurrence?
- Are there outstanding OHS concerns or action items?
- Are there staff welfare or well-being issues emerging?
- Do a top three exercise with your team
  - What are three things we as a team are doing to promote workplace safety?
  - What are the three things we are doing right in OHS?
  - What are the three top OHS control measures we are relying on to keep the workplace safe? How do we know they are continuing to be effective? Are there improvements that can be made?
  - What are the three top OHS or staff welfare grumbles?
  - What are the three top OHS hazards we face and what is being done to manage them?

### Safety on the Management Team Agenda

If you are committed to being a safety leader for your area, you will include the health, wellbeing and safety of your staff as a standing item on your agenda for management and team meetings. The HWS discussion during management meetings could include from time to time:

- Expect your managers to talk to you about safety: major risks they face, serious incidents they experience
- Formally acknowledge the inclusion of safety considerations in business decisions and make it personal
- Reviewing and actioning workplace inspections.
- Reviewing reports of work related hazards, incidents and injuries. Checking responsiveness and corrective actions as needed.
- Reviewing HWS reports (OHS, Sick Leave use) and minutes/actions from local HWS Committees
- Considering potential OHS issues or those raised by staff and planning for consultation and resolution.
- Considering staff welfare issues including reasonable accommodations and return to work.
- Considering adequacy of staff facilities.
- Planning suitable OHS training, including induction of new workers.
- Reviewing the OHS Risk Register.
- Prioritising hazards to be addressed and allocating responsibility and resources for these.
- Developing / reviewing the annual HWS Activity Plan and monitoring progress over time.
- Developing / reviewing specifically staff wellbeing issues and developing / monitoring staff wellbeing initiatives or programs.
- Reviewing OHS aspects of proposed purchases of equipment, goods and services, proposed projects to be undertaken within the work group and proposed workplace changes.

### Substantiating safety leadership

There is still a compliance aspect to health and safety which means that safe systems of work need to be substantiated through:

- Induction records
- Training records
- Risk assessments
- Material Safety Data Sheets (up to date)
- Incident report forms
- Local emergency procedures

### Further Information

Further information can be obtained by reading the [OHS Responsibilities section](#) of the [OHS Manual](#) and the document [OHS Responsibilities of Managers](#).

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