

What influences employees more - operational constraints or their own and others' safety?

'Safety is all about getting the attitude right'

On the surface this statement seems difficult to argue with.

Research into human psychology, however, has revealed how external pressures can override a lot of positive attitudes and lead to behaviour which runs counter to our normal internal beliefs.

In 1973, John Darley and C. Daniel Baston conducted an experiment involving trainee priests. In the experiment, two groups of seminarians were asked to deliver a presentation on the Good Samaritan. On the way to deliver the presentation both groups were faced with a person lying in the road, obviously in distress and asking for help.

Group 1 was asked to deliver the presentation with no external pressures. Group 2, however, were told that they were late and that people were waiting for them, so they needed to hurry.

Out of Group 1, 63% stopped to offer assistance; out of Group 2, however, only 10% stopped and offered help.

Darley and Baston concluded from their results that:

"Thinking about norms does not imply that one will act on them. Maybe ethics become a luxury as the speed of our daily lives increases; or maybe people's cognition was narrowed by the hurriedness and they failed to make the immediate connection of an emergency."

We may have an awful lot of well meaning people with positive attitudes to safety in our organisation. If, however, there are undue pressures from such things as time, money and production, these 'negative activators' can be a far more powerful influence on their behaviour than what they believe to be right.

Safety is not just a matter of getting attitudes right, it is also about creating 'positive activators' in the environment that increase the likelihood of positive attitudes being consistently acted upon.

Senior Leaders set the environment and the motivators which will determine the risk taking behaviours of the workforce. Positive Safety Leadership from the very top directly impacts on your safety culture.

Article from Harry Gallagher from the 2 macs, a drama based 'behavioural safety' learning Consultancy based in Newcastle -upon-Tyne.

*Harry Gallagher
Macnaughton McGregor
0191 246 1160
07967 379 602
harry@2macs.com*



The 2 Macs in teaching mode