



071: Responding to Your Customer's Unsafe Acts

The situation

Your job may require you to work on a customer site where the customer is present and safety is not a priority.

Even if safety is a priority with the customer company, some customer employees may show a disregard for the safety of contractors. A certain prejudice does exist.

You are in a political position where you don't wish to offend the customer.

You can use safety as a means to improve your relationship with the customer.

General principles

Give the other person the benefit of the doubt. We all make mistakes, and we all have something to learn about safety. Assume the customer is unaware of a problem and would correct it if informed. Assume an employee who is breaking safety rules just doesn't know them well enough.

In this toolbox talk, we refer to "the customer" in a collective sense. It's the company and or its management and employees as a group. Keep in mind that the group may be very safety-conscious, but there may be a person or two in that group who is not quite with the program.

Don't argue with the customer or individual employees. Communicate the problem to the other party if the situation requires you to do that.

Never argue with your foreman in front of the customer. If you feel a safety issue has not been resolved properly, ask to see your foreman in private.

Your foreman has to document the problem and the resolution. When explaining a safety problem that involves the customer, be specific without being accusatory. Look for solutions, not ways to affix blame.

You can catch more bees with honey than with vinegar. Use courtesy at every step, and be in the role of ally. Don't position yourself as a safety cop out to bust the customer. Position yourself as a person who cares about safety—while implying the customer also cares and you want to work together for safety.

Be pleasant, and you will probably make a friend because you showed you cared. This helps build a relationship that brings good referrals for your company.

If the customer site has an unsafe condition

Stop work if the condition affects your work area.

If you have a good working relationship, ask the customer to help you resolve the condition. Otherwise, contact your foreman and explain the condition.

If a customer employee is creating an unsafe condition

Stop. Ask the employee to stop. Ask, "May I explain a safer way to do that?"

If the employee continues to create the unsafe condition, let the supervisor of that employee know. It isn't your job to supervise the customer's employee—you did your part by communicating the hazard to the employee.

If the unsafe condition prevents you from working in the area, let the customer employee or the supervisor of that employee know why. Report to your foreman.

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Ask your customer if you can trade safety manuals for a few days, just for comparison.

What this Safety Talk covers:

How to deal with customers, or employees of customers, who do unsafe acts or create unsafe working conditions—unintentionally or otherwise.

Discussion notes :

