

The best way to keep your employees safe is to create a positive and supportive **safety culture** where the entire group works cooperatively to establish and maintain an injury-free workplace.

- Supervisors and managers demonstrate a **visible** commitment to safety.
- All workers are engaged in the safety and injury-prevention effort.
- Safety is imbedded in the way the work is done.
- Workers know that safety is a **value** to you and other supervisors and managers. (A value is a shared attitude and mindset; a value does not waver as work priorities and production pressures change.)

Not sure where to start with safety communication?

## Step 1:

Get a baseline by counting the number of times you currently communicate with your employees about safety.

## Step 2:

Set a goal to increase this number. Choose something that will be obtainable, but which will be noticeable to your employees. Depending on your organizational structure and the work you do, it might be reasonable to set a goal for one safety contact per person per day.

## Step 3:

Track and record the number of contacts you make until you are routinely meeting your goal.

As a supervisor, you are responsible for ensuring that employees perform their work safely and in a safe environment. Good communication is critical to creating and maintaining a safe workplace.

You can do a number of things that help do this:

## Talk about safety often.

The number of safety communications between employees and their supervisors is an indicator of the strength of the safety culture.

**Hold weekly safety meetings.** (See How to hold a tailgate meeting.)

**Start each day with a short group get-together** to cover plans for the day and include two-way discussion about safety issues and expectations.

**Walk through the work area** and provide feedback, especially be sure to thank employees using safe practices and appropriate PPE. (See Coaching.)

**Conduct observations.** (See Observations.)

**Engage employees** in safety improvement efforts and recognize their contributions.

**Include safety** in performance assessments.

**Keep a training calendar** and accurate training records so you can discuss training status with your employees.

## Create relationships.

**Know your employees on a personal level**

**Schedule routine, brief, one-on-one meetings** to learn how work and home-life challenges affect them.

**Find out what is important** to each employee: spouse, kids, extended family, and pets; important achievements and goals they are working toward; issues they are struggling with, such as juggling kids' schedules or supporting aging parents.

**Create a photo board.** Post team photos and ask employees to post photos of their families, passions, and other reasons they want to work safely.

**Treat employees as individuals.**

**Demonstrate support**

**Check in with employees frequently** to see how they are doing with their work assignments. While checking in, give the employees an opportunity to talk about their lives outside of work and any problems they are experiencing that might affect their job.



## Generate trust

**Be responsive.** Follow up every time an employee asks a question or has a request. Keep a list to document the question and ensure you get back to the person.

## Maintain confidentiality.

**Be a good role model.** If you require employees to wear safety glasses, make sure you wear your safety glasses.

Remember, your relationship continues when an employee is injured. Check in frequently and maintain good communication if an employee is not able to return to work or has returned and is working with restrictions.

# Share and reinforce expectations

**Share your vision** with your employees and set team goals.

**Involve your employees** in setting and accomplishing goals that support the vision.

**Visibly track accomplishments.** Use a board that shows completed job safety analyses, completed inspections, number of safety trainings, etc., as well as the status of the safety improvement projects.

**Celebrate successes.** One of the many ways to celebrate is to sponsor a break with refreshments when goals are met.

**Acknowledge employee participation** in group or organizational success.

**Recognize employee contribution** to safety culture and injury prevention during performance assessments.

# Know the work environment

As the supervisor, you need to understand your employees' work processes and the potential hazards in your workplace.

**Lead,** or be an active participant in, required safety inspections.

**Lead,** or be an active participant in, doing safety assessments and creating job hazard analyses.

**Use group problem solving** to control or eliminate hazards.

**If you have not done the work recently,** shadow or fill in for an employee to actually experience the work.



**3**  
types of  
communication

## Verbal

What you say and your word choice

## Vocal

How you say it: your voice, pauses, tone, and volume

## Visual

How you look while you speak: your posture, eye contact, and hand gestures

The art of communication is the most important skill a supervisor can have, and it can be either simple or complicated. It is easy to send the wrong message without being aware of it.



As a supervisor, it is important to be an active listener. You need to:

- **Expect to learn from the person speaking.**
- **Show interest.**
- **Take notes.**
- **Listen now for follow-up later.**
- **Be present; resist distractions.**

## Give positive feedback

**Give specific examples** of observed behavior.

**Include specific qualities** that contribute to success.

**State the benefit** to you, the team, or the company.

## Give constructive feedback

**Prepare**

**Define the outcome.**

**Anticipate** the employees' points of view.

**Select the time and location.**

**Communicate**

**Describe** the situation.

**Explain** the problem it causes.

**Clarify**

**Understand** the employees' points of view.

**Commit**

**Involve employees** in your problem-solving discussion.

It takes time and experience to be able to comfortably and genuinely provide this type of communication, but the time spent practicing is worth it.

Studies show that people give

**75** percent more attention to **visual information** than strictly **verbal** or **vocal information**. Knowing this, how can we more effectively communicate?

Dr. Albert Mehrabian and Susan R. Ferris  
Journal of Consulting Psychology (1967)

The obstacles or distractions that can easily lead to a miscommunication and a lost opportunity to really understand your employee take different forms. The most common types of obstacles are:

### Mind reading

Reading between the lines, listening with assumptions, being suspicious of an agenda (“What is he really thinking?”)

### Judging

Labeling the speaker, pre-evaluating the message (“I know what you’re going to say.”)

### Identifying

Listen only in the context of your own experience (“That reminds me of the time when I ...”)

### Rehearsing

Focusing on what you are going to say instead listening to what the other person has to say.

### Day dreaming

Half-listening, not being present (“I wonder what my next vacation will be like.”)

### Advising

Instead of listening, you’re solving the other person’s problem, whether she wants your help or not.

### Being right

Can’t hear other points of view; criticism or suggestions fall on deaf ears (“I know I’m right, so why should I listen to you.”)

### Derailing

If the topic gets difficult, you derail the conversation by joking or changing the subject.

### Placating

You want to be nice or pleasant, so you agree with everything others say. It’s easier than listening and having a serious discussion.

### Comparing

You are always trying to assess who is smarter, more competent, better dressed, better prepared—the list goes on. You are not listening to the conversation



## Written and electronic communication

Supervisors often communicate by email, texting, and websites. Find out which is the most effective way to communicate with your employees.

Here are the four key points for successful written communication.

1. Know your reader or readers.
2. Keep the writing simple.
3. Keep the writing positive.
4. Keep the writing accurate.

Perhaps the most important factor in written communication is to remember that your reader cannot read your facial expression or hear the tone of your voice when reading your emails or reports.

## 4

communication styles



### Traditional

“Hi, how are you?”  
“Did you have a nice weekend?”  
“Have a great day.”



### Task-focused

Factual, analytical, direct, and to the point



### Trust-building

Share opinions and feelings



### Teasing

Joking, sarcasm, and cruel humor

*A coach is someone who can give correction without causing resentment.*

— John Wooden

## Coaching tips

### Show your concern.

Let employees know that you are coaching them because you are concerned for their safety.

### Don't accuse.

Communicate using "I" statements and not "you" statements.

### Be specific.

Do not speak in general terms.

### Don't assume.

First seek to understand the issues.

### Ask open-ended questions.

Ask questions that don't just result in "yes" or "no."

### Involve employees in the solution.

Listen to the employees' ideas.

### Offer your help.

Show employees that you are there to help them.

### Obtain a verbal commitment.

Ask employees if they will work safely in the future.

### Emphasize the positive:

- Reinforce expectations
- Reward good habits
- Build confidence
- Improve morale
- Build best practices



## I've Got Your Back

*Some companies have used an "I've got your back" contract to promote safety coaching between employees. Here is an example.*

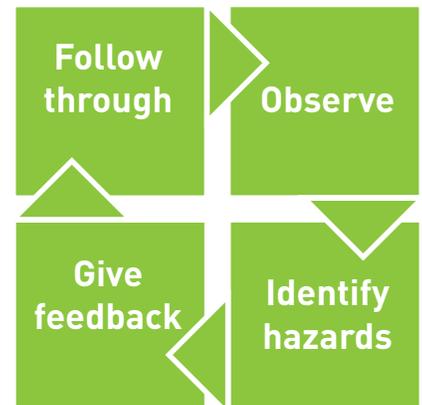
If you see me doing something unsafe, approaching an unsafe condition, or slipping into automatic behavior, you please let me know.

I agree to do the same for you. I will accept your intervention as an act of caring about my health and safety.

I agree to intervene for the same reason. I will take your information and give information with trust and respect, so we can mutually benefit.

## Take action

Observing safety hazards and giving appropriate feedback is essential for an effective safety program. In a recent study\*, employees did not intervene 40 percent of the time when they saw unsafe acts, stating that they were afraid the other person would be angry or would not change anyway. In some ways, they were right. Employees reacted defensively a quarter of the time and did not change their behavior more than half the time. Effective coaching techniques can improve employee response and follow-through.



\* A Study of Safety Intervention: The Causes and Consequences of Employees' Silence. EHS Today. July 1, 2011, By Phillip Ragain

# Ineffective coaching statements

## **Uncaring.**

“If you fall, you could cost the company a lot of money.”

## **Accusing.**

“You should know better.”

## **Vague.**

“You need to be safe.”

## **Assuming.**

“You are just being lazy.”

## **Yes or no questions.**

“Are you aware that there is another ladder?”

## **Not involving.**

“Next time, do it the way that we told you.”

## **Not helping.**

“Get to work.”

## **No verbal commitment.**

“Make sure that you don’t do that again.”

## **Negative.**

“You need to have common sense.”

# Effective coaching statements

## **Caring.**

“I don’t want to see you get hurt.”

## **Not accusing.**

“Why are the two of you on the same ladder?”

## **Be specific.**

“Two people can’t safely be on that ladder.”

## **Not assuming.**

“Are you familiar with these types of ladders?”

## **Open-ended questions.**

“What is a better way to do this?”

## **Involving employees.**

“What should we do differently next time?”

## **Helping.**

“I will get you a longer ladder.”

## **Verbal commitment.**

“What are you going to do next time?”

## **Positive/humor.**

“Thanks for the hard work with the siding.”

*The best way to motivate employees to work safely is to thank them when you see them working safely.*

— Scott Geller

# 50 ways supervisors communicate safety

It's not just what you say, it is also what you do that communicates safety. Here are some ways your actions can speak volumes.

## Demonstrate leadership and grow a positive safety culture

1. Be sure that you follow the safety rules you are asking others to follow.
2. Do one-on-one safety coaching; offer to help address a safety issue.
3. Correct safety violations immediately.
4. Plan and budget for Personal Protective Equipment and other safety improvements.
5. Talk about safety expectations during job interviews.
6. Consistently correct unsafe behaviors.
7. Seek to understand root causes of all incidents or accidents.
8. Create safety goals (for example, increasing the number of job hazard analyses, observations, and safety meetings).
9. Include safety as a standing agenda item in every meeting.
10. Follow up on employee suggestions and keep a log of safety questions and responses.
11. Actively participate in and support the safety committee.
12. Be a safety advocate - communicate safety issues to upper management.
13. Make a big deal about safety improvements.

## Reduce hazards

14. Conduct job hazard analyses.
15. Complete accident investigations; identify all factors that caused the injury without placing blame.
16. Do frequent hazard inspections.
17. Invite an OSHA or a SAIF consultant into the organization to review your safety program.
18. Evaluate equipment for safety before purchasing; perform safety review prior to installation.
19. Conduct safety observations to ensure employees are using safety equipment and safe practices.
20. Stop to clean up a spill or mess.
21. Provide appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and ensure it fits or works for employees.
22. Label hazards.
23. Install and maintain guards on equipment.
24. Make ergonomic improvements (for example, install ergonomic mats and material-handling equipment).
25. Remove trip and slip hazards.
26. Maintain equipment (implement preventive maintenance schedule); remove old, unsafe equipment from service.

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27. Use alternative, safer chemicals.
  28. Minimize the chance for workplace violence.
  29. Go beyond OSHA compliance.
  30. Post weather warnings.
  31. Install and rotate safety posters.

### Recognize safety performance

32. Make safety a part of employees' performance assessments (for example: contributions to the safety effort, safety leadership, use of PPE, and following safety rules).
33. Thank employees for using safe work practices and contributing to the safety improvement effort.
34. Recognize employees' contributions to the injury prevention effort at departmental or other meetings.
35. Provide incentives for doing safety-related activities and making safety improvements.
36. Post safety accomplishments in a visible location.
37. Encourage employees to thank each other for using safe work practices.

### Provide safety training

38. Hold frequent tailgate meetings.
39. Provide all-employee safety trainings.
40. Provide new employee orientation and on-the-job training
41. Have a guest speaker conduct training.

42. Send people to Oregon OSHA and SAIF employee trainings or use online training tools.
43. When possible, tie safety training to home, work, and play.

### Empower employees

44. Ensure employees from your group actively solicit input for and share information from the safety committee.
45. Develop employee skills; give employees opportunities to present tailgate and other safety trainings and learn new skills.
46. Implement peer-to-peer safety coaching.
47. Empower employees to stop unsafe work practices: use a "I've got your back" contract.
48. Provide a safety suggestion box or poster to record concerns, issues, and acknowledgements.
49. Involve employees in identifying safety improvements.
50. Take steps to ensure open, two-way communication.



# Energize your safety committee

An active, engaged safety committee can have a positive impact on your workplace. Here are 10 ways to energize your safety committee and achieve outstanding results:

## When safety is valued:

Workplaces hazards decrease.

Safe work practices increase.

Pain and suffering is avoided.

Morale goes up.

Costs are controlled.

**Create a vision statement.** Keep it short and inspiring: “We want every employee to go home safely every day.” Post it for everyone to see. Consider having employees sign it. Review it frequently at safety committee meetings.

**Know your purpose.** Develop a safety committee charter. Outline specific roles and responsibilities. Emphasize that members can make a difference by preventing injuries, improving profitability, and insuring legal compliance.

**Recruit safety champions.** Find members with energy and enthusiasm for workplace safety. Ask what they need to stay engaged. Keep a good balance of employees and management. Change members periodically to bring in fresh ideas.

**Get support from senior management.** Ask top management to write and sign a safety policy statement. Remind supervisors to support all safety efforts. Invite executives to attend meetings. Seek financial and management resources.

**Set meaningful goals.** Use proactive measures to assess safety performance, such as the number of safety inspections, employees trained, and near misses reported. Focus on success.

**Stay upbeat.** Share a near miss or proactive measure that prevented an



injury. Promote open communication and problem solving. Invite a third party, such as your SAIF safety consultant, to observe meetings and offer feedback.

**Become a high performance safety team.** A team implies action and purpose. Choose a name. Follow the three “P”s for success:

- **Planning.** Hold regular meetings and give them as much importance as other work activities.
- **Preparation.** Publish your agenda in advance. Make it specific, timely, and relevant. Stick to it.
- **Performance.** Have meaningful discussions, action items, and follow-up.

**Involve team members in meaningful activities.** Do a job hazard analysis. Assist with incident analysis. Assist with annual program review and revision. Develop safe operating procedures. Conduct safety orientations. Sponsor an ergo team.

**Acknowledge success.** Make posters, t-shirts, hats, or badges to identify team members. Celebrate successes in company meetings. Nominate employees who made a positive contribution as “safety stars.”

**Provide training and enrichment.** Invite outside speakers. Support attendance at OSHA classes and American Society of Safety Engineers meetings. Encourage fun and creativity.

# 25 ways to be a SAFETY HERO



1. Join your company's safety committee, or sit in on a meeting.
2. Mentor new employees on safety.
3. Plan and participate in a company safety fair.
4. Assist with an ergonomics evaluation.
5. Contribute articles or photos to the company newsletter.
6. Make safety posters.
7. Help investigate an accident or near miss.
8. Participate in quarterly safety inspections.
9. Acknowledge co-workers for safe actions, such as cleaning up spills, holding doors, and wearing personal protective equipment.
10. Develop monthly tailgate topics for shift meetings.
11. Help set safety goals, such as correcting hazards in a timely manner.
12. Make safety observations and give feedback.
13. Take safety photos.
14. Assist with risk assessments.
15. Become a specialist in one area at work and take relevant safety classes.
16. Evaluate existing company safety policies.
17. Attend a management/supervisor meeting as a guest to talk about why safety is important.
18. Share what you are doing for safety at home.
19. Offer to attend a new employee orientation to talk about safety.
20. Report unsafe conditions such as broken equipment, leaks, insufficient lighting, improper labeling of chemical containers, and unsafe work practices.
21. Take advantage of SIM4® and SIM-plicity™ training opportunities.
22. Promote OSHA's "Safety Break for Oregon."
23. Ask for input from other employees and share their ideas in safety meetings.
24. Assist with personal protective equipment/hazard assessments.
25. Determine safety training needs, such as forklift operations, ergonomics, lockout/tagout, etc.

When you notice someone being safe, say "thank you."

Safety isn't just for work. Take it home with you.

When you see something that's unsafe, take action. Don't just walk away.

Adapted from  
“Family Supportive  
Supervisor  
Behaviors”  
by Leslie Hammer,  
Ph.D., Portland  
State University

# Create a safer workplace by being a supportive supervisor

Juggling work demands and family responsibilities can cause stress which in turn can affect personal health as well as job safety and quality.

“Family Supportive Supervisor Behaviors” is a tool that addresses how supervisors and managers can help workers ease the stress of work and family life. Supervisors are the key to increasing worker engagement on the job, improving worker well-being, and reducing workplace injury.

“Family Supportive Supervisor Behaviors” requires supervisors to focus on specific, repeated behaviors, as noted below:

## Promote emotional support

Behaviors that demonstrate workers are being cared for and their feelings are being considered:

- Increasing face-to-face contact with employees
- Asking how employees are doing
- Communicating genuine concern about employees’ work and life challenges

## Model healthy work-family behaviors

Actions that show how you are taking care of your own work/life challenges:

- Discussing the importance of attending your child’s school activities
- Talking about your own family
- Leaving work at reasonable hours to show that you, too, have a nonwork life

## Help workers solve schedule conflicts

Helping workers manage schedules:

- Encouraging workers to let you know if their needs change and adjustments are necessary to their schedule
- Encouraging workers to learn new job skills to increase their ability to fill different positions

## Think strategically about work-life issues

Actions aimed at redesigning work to support the conflicting employee work-life demands in a manner that is win-win for employee and employers:

- Knowing and communicating about your company’s work-life programs (for example, Employee Assistance Program, Health Care Coach, Adoption Assistance).
- Promoting cross-training and back-up systems to cover missed shifts
- Thinking about the team or department as a whole and relationships with other departments and possible cross-training or cross-team work can help in getting the job done

