



The California

Contractor

News for the Western Regional Master Builders Association

May-June 2024

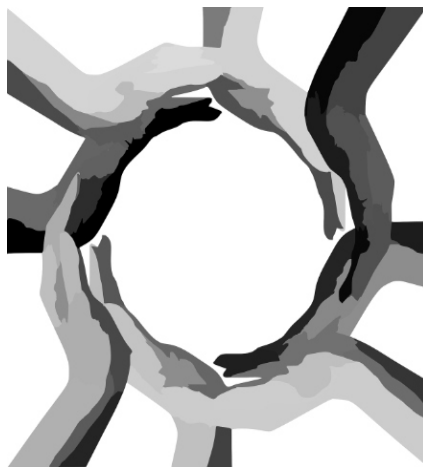
Volume 49 No. 3

A healthy business culture includes open communication

By Howard Deutsch

For your company to be highly successful today and in the future, your organization needs to have highly engaged employees and a healthy culture. A healthy culture includes communication without barriers, collaboration and innovation, among many other organizational characteristics. One really important characteristic of healthy corporate cultures is the ability of all employees to speak openly and candidly with their supervisor or manager. Employees need to feel comfortable and able to suggest innovative ideas and ways to do things better, identify or report problems, request assistance when needed and suggest ways their work group/department/team can become more effective.

Even in companies that pride themselves in having a healthy corporate culture, it is very likely that some managers and supervisors stifle open upward communication. In one employee engagement survey in a financial services company with several hundred employees with average annual compensation well in excess of \$100,000, employees were asked their level of agreement with the statement “I can speak openly and candidly with my manager/supervisor.” The employee survey used a 5-point scale to measure employees’ level of agreement with this



statement, where 5 equaled “strongly agree” and 1 equaled “strongly disagree.” The overall rating for this question was 4.22, indicating relatively strong agreement that most employees feel they can speak openly and candidly with their manager/supervisor. Some employees provided ratings of 1, 2 and 3 indicating they do not feel they can speak openly and candidly with their manager/supervisor.

Employees were given the opportunity to provide comments after this question and many of them described why they feel they can or cannot speak openly and candidly with their manager/supervisor. Following are

Please see TALK, page 2

At A Glance

How can employees feel heard?

Invest in an energy-efficient future

Workers’ comp claim strategies, explained

Spring clean the forgotten places

The hazards of lead-acid batteries

... and more

Talk: Comments illustrate feelings about communication

Continued from page 1

some of the comments from employees that felt they cannot speak openly and candidly with their manager/supervisor. Does your organization have any of the types of problems described in these comments? Can you imagine how it feels to work for a manager that you cannot speak openly and candidly with, and what this means to employee and organizational effectiveness and performance? Can your organization benefit from an employee engagement survey/employee opinion survey that assesses a wide range of issues that impact employee and organizational effectiveness and performance, and identifies where problems exist and what needs to be done to strengthen your corporate culture, employee engagement and company's success? Here are

the employee survey illustrative comments:

- I feel my manager hears but doesn't listen so I don't speak to this person half as much as I would like to.
- Am able to, theoretically, but in terms of actual availability, he's almost never available.
- I sometimes feel that when I speak to my manager I'm not taken as seriously as I feel I should be.
- I speak openly, but do not have confidence that I am heard.
- It depends on the subject.
- I am sometimes wary of being entirely candid with my manager because I often times disagree with her

managerial decisions/actions.

- He is the most patient and understanding employee I have ever trained with.
- My manager is new to the group and we're still learning to work together. My early read is that his eagerness to impress his manager overrides his interactions with the team.
- I need to build the relationship first to ensure I feel I can speak openly and candidly. I am not at that point right now. He seems to be concerned with "ruffling" feathers, so I am not sure I would be comfortable speaking about controversial issues to him.
- It depends on my manager's mood at the time. I really don't think they are looking for my opinion.

As an employee, what if you don't feel heard?

Feeling like your voice isn't being heard in the workplace can be frustrating and demoralizing. Whether it's during meetings, decision-making processes, or day-to-day interactions, the sense of being overlooked or ignored can take a toll on employee morale and engagement. However, there are constructive ways to navigate these feelings and advocate for yourself effectively. Here's a guide to help employees find their voice and address concerns about not being heard by their employers.



you speaking up assertively and clearly expressing your ideas and opinions? Pay attention to your tone, body language, and communication style to ensure that your message is being conveyed effectively.

1. Reflect on Your Communication Style

Before assuming that you're not being heard, take a moment to reflect on your communication style. Are

2. Choose the Right Time and Place

Timing is everything

when it comes to communication in the workplace. Choose opportune moments to voice your concerns or ideas, such as during team meetings, one-on-one discussions with your manager, or designated feedback sessions. Avoid interrupting or speaking out of turn, as this can detract from your message and lead to misinterpretation.

3. Be Specific and Constructive

When expressing your concerns or ideas, be specific and constructive in your communication. Clearly articulate what you're experiencing or feeling and provide concrete examples to support your points. Avoid vague or generalized statements and focus on offering solutions or suggestions for improvement.

4. Seek Out Allies and

Advocates

If you're feeling unheard in the workplace, seek out allies and advocates who can support and amplify your voice. Build relationships with colleagues who share your concerns or perspectives and collaborate to address common issues. Consider approaching a trusted mentor, HR representative, or employee resource group for guidance and support.

5. Use Active Listening Skills

Effective communication is a two-way street that requires active listening as well as speaking. Practice active listening skills by fully engaging with others when they speak, asking clarifying questions, and acknowledging their

Please see HEAR, page 8

Invest in an energy-efficient future

In today's world, energy conservation is not just a personal responsibility; it's a collective effort that every workplace should actively engage in. By implementing energy-saving practices, businesses can reduce their carbon footprint, lower operating costs, and contribute to a more sustainable future.

Upgrade to Energy-Efficient Lighting

- One of the most effective ways to conserve energy in the workplace is by upgrading to energy-efficient lighting solutions such as LED bulbs.

- LED bulbs consume significantly less energy than traditional incandescent or fluorescent bulbs and have a longer lifespan, reducing the frequency of replacements.

- Consider installing motion sensors or timers to automatically turn off lights in unoccupied areas, further minimizing energy waste.

Optimize Heating and Cooling Systems

- Properly maintain heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems to ensure they operate efficiently.

- Regularly clean or replace air filters to improve airflow and reduce energy consumption.

- Utilize programmable thermostats to adjust temperature settings based on occupancy schedules, avoiding unnecessary heating or cooling during off-hours.

Reduce Standby Power Usage

- Encourage employees to power off computers, monitors, printers, and other electronic devices when not in use, rather than leaving them in standby

mode.

- Invest in smart power strips that automatically cut off power to peripheral devices when the primary device is turned off, preventing standby power usage.

Implement Energy-Efficient Office Equipment

- Choose energy-efficient office equipment such as ENERGY STAR-rated computers, printers, copiers, and fax machines.

- Adjust power settings on electronic devices to enable sleep or hibernate mode after periods of inactivity, further reducing energy consumption.

Promote Telecommuting and Flexible Work Schedules

- Embrace telecommuting and flexible work schedules to reduce the need for employees to commute to the office daily.

- Remote work not only saves energy but also reduces traffic congestion and lowers greenhouse gas emissions associated with transportation.



Encourage Energy-Conscious Behaviors

- Raise awareness among employees about the importance of energy conservation and encourage them to adopt energy-conscious behaviors.

- Provide training or educational materials on energy-saving practices and their impact on the environment and company finances.

Conduct Energy Audits

- Regularly conduct energy audits to identify areas of inefficiency and opportunities for improvement.

- Engage employees in the audit process to gather insights and suggestions for optimizing energy usage in the workplace.

Invest in Renewable Energy Sources

- Explore opportunities to invest in renewable energy sources such as solar panels or wind turbines to generate clean, sustainable energy onsite.

- Renewable energy investments not only reduce reliance on fossil fuels but also offer long-term cost savings and environmental benefits.

Conserving energy at work is not only a responsible business practice but also a strategic investment in sustainability and cost savings. By implementing the strategies outlined above, businesses can significantly reduce their energy consumption, minimize environmental impact, and create a more eco-friendly workplace culture. Let's commit to energizing our workplaces with smart energy-saving practices for a greener and brighter future.

Workers' comp claim strategies, explained

Workers' compensation claims can be a significant burden for companies, both financially and operationally. However, with effective strategies in place, businesses can mitigate risks, improve safety measures, and streamline the claims process. In this article, we'll explore key strategies that companies can implement to deal with workers' compensation claims efficiently.

1. Establish a Comprehensive Safety Program:

- Prevention is the best strategy when it comes to managing workers' compensation claims. Companies should prioritize workplace safety by implementing comprehensive safety programs.

- Conduct regular safety training sessions for employees to educate them about potential hazards and safe work practices.

- Encourage a culture of safety where employees feel empowered to report safety concerns and near-miss incidents promptly.

2. Conduct Regular Risk Assessments:

- Regular risk assessments help identify potential hazards in the workplace and take proactive measures to mitigate them.

- Evaluate equipment, machinery, and work processes regularly to ensure they meet safety standards and comply with regulations.

- Involve employees in the risk assessment process as they can provide valuable insights into potential safety risks in their respective work areas.

3. Provide Proper Safety Equipment:

- Ensure that employees have access to appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as helmets, gloves, goggles, and safety harnesses.

- Regularly inspect and maintain safety equipment to ensure its effectiveness.

- Train employees on the proper use and maintenance of safety equipment to maximize its benefits.

4. Implement Return-to-Work Programs:

- Develop structured return-to-work programs that facilitate the smooth transition of injured employees back to the workplace.

- Offer modified duties or alternative tasks that accommodate the injured employee's capabilities while they recover.

- Communicate openly with injured employees to understand their needs and provide necessary support during their rehabilitation process.

5. Maintain Accurate Documentation:

- Accurate documentation is crucial for effectively managing workers' compensation claims. Maintain detailed records of workplace incidents, injuries, and near misses.

- Document all safety training sessions, risk assessments, and safety equipment inspections.

- Keep thorough records of workers' compensation claims, including injury reports, medical records, and communication with insurance providers.

6. Partner with Experienced Professionals:

- Collaborate with experienced professionals such as occupational health and safety consultants, legal advisors, and insurance providers.

- Seek guidance from professionals who specialize in workers' compensation claims management to navigate complex legal and regulatory requirements.

- Stay informed about changes in workers' compensation laws and regulations to ensure compliance and mitigate potential risks.

7. Foster Open Communication:

- Establish channels for open communication between management, employees, and relevant stakeholders regarding safety concerns and workers' compensation claims.

- Encourage employees to report workplace hazards, injuries, and near misses without fear of reprisal.

- Provide regular updates to employees on safety initiatives, claim status, and company policies related to workers' compensation.

Effective management of workers' compensation claims requires a proactive approach to workplace safety, thorough documentation, and open communication. By implementing these strategies, companies can reduce the frequency and severity of workplace injuries, minimize the financial impact of claims, and create a safer and healthier work environment for employees. Additionally, fostering a culture of safety and support can enhance employee morale and productivity, ultimately benefiting the company's bottom line.



Spring cleaning? Don't forget these places

As the weather warms up and flowers bloom, many people embark on their annual spring cleaning routines. Here are some tasks that may be overlooked, and how to know what to keep and what to toss when you tidy up those cupboards.

Clean overlooked, neglected areas

1. Clean Light Fixtures and Ceiling Fans:

- Light fixtures and ceiling fans accumulate dust and dirt over time, affecting air quality and overall cleanliness.

- Use a microfiber cloth or duster to wipe down light fixtures, removing dust and grime.

- For ceiling fans, use a damp cloth or vacuum with a brush attachment to clean both the blades and the motor housing.

2. Wash Window Treatments:

- Window treatments such as curtains, drapes, and blinds can trap dust, allergens, and pet hair.

- Remove curtains and drapes and launder them according to the manufacturer's instructions.

- For blinds, wipe them down with a damp cloth or use a vacuum with a brush attachment to remove dust and debris.

3. Deep Clean Upholstered Furniture:

- Upholstered furniture can harbor dust mites, allergens, and spills that accumulate over time.

- Use a upholstery cleaner or a mixture of mild detergent and water to spot clean stains and spills.

- Vacuum upholstered furniture thoroughly, paying attention to crevices and seams where dirt can accumulate.

4. Scrub Baseboards and Moldings:



- Baseboards and moldings are often overlooked during regular cleaning but can accumulate dust, pet hair, and grime.

- Use a damp cloth or sponge to wipe down baseboards and moldings, removing dirt and buildup.

- For stubborn stains or grime, use a mild cleaning solution and a soft-bristled brush to scrub the surface gently.

5. Clean Behind Appliances:

- Over time, dust, crumbs, and grease can accumulate behind appliances such as refrigerators, stoves, and washing machines.

- Move appliances away from the wall and vacuum or sweep behind them to remove debris.

- Wipe down the back and sides of appliances with a damp cloth to remove dust and grease buildup.

6. Refresh Mattresses and Pillows:

- Mattresses and pillows can harbor dust mites, sweat, and allergens, impacting sleep quality and comfort.

- Vacuum mattresses and pillows thoroughly to remove dust and debris.

- Spot clean stains with a mixture

of mild detergent and water, then allow the mattress or pillow to air dry completely.

7. Inspect and Clean Air Vents:

- Air vents can become clogged with dust and debris, reducing the efficiency of heating and cooling systems.

- Remove vent covers and vacuum inside the ducts using a brush attachment.

- Wipe down vent covers with a damp cloth to remove dust and grime before reattaching them.

Organizing? What to keep and what to toss

Clutter can accumulate quickly, leading to decreased productivity and increased stress levels. Streamlining your workspace not only enhances efficiency but also fosters a clear and focused mindset.

What to Keep:

1. Essential Tools and Equipment:

- Identify tools and equipment necessary for your daily tasks and keep them easily accessible.

- This may include computers, printers, scanners, phones, and any specialized tools relevant to your profession.

2. Important Documents:

- Maintain a system for organizing and storing important documents such as contracts, client information, financial records, and company policies.

- Invest in digital storage solutions to minimize paper clutter and ensure easy access to essential documents.

3. Office Supplies:

Please see CLEAN, page 8

What has the CSLB been up to lately?

The California State License Board (CSLB) plays a crucial role in regulating the construction industry and ensuring consumer protection across the state. Over the years, the CSLB has implemented various initiatives and policies to uphold industry standards and safeguard the interests of both contractors and consumers. Here are some recent developments and updates from the CSLB:



Increased Enforcement Efforts

In recent years, the CSLB has intensified its enforcement efforts to crack down on unlicensed contractors and illegal construction activities. Through sting operations, proactive investigations, and collaboration with law enforcement agencies, the CSLB has targeted unscrupulous individuals and businesses operating without proper licensure. These efforts aim to protect consumers from substandard workmanship, financial harm, and safety hazards associated with unlicensed contractors.

Focus on Consumer Education and Outreach

The CSLB places a strong emphasis on consumer education and outreach to empower Californians with knowledge and resources to make informed decisions when hiring contractors. Through its website, workshops, informational materials, and outreach events, the CSLB provides valuable guidance on topics such as hiring licensed contractors, understanding contract terms, and navigating the construction process. By promoting awareness and transparency, the CSLB strives to prevent disputes and promote fair practices in the construction industry.

Implementation of New Licensing Requirements

To adapt to evolving industry standards and regulatory requirements, the CSLB periodically updates its licensing requirements and processes.

Recent developments may include changes to licensing exams, qualifications, and continuing education requirements for contractors in various trades. These updates aim to ensure that licensed contractors possess the necessary skills, knowledge, and competencies to meet the demands of their respective fields and deliver high-quality workmanship to consumers.

Embrace of Technology and Innovation

In an increasingly digital age, the CSLB has embraced technology and innovation to enhance its operations and services. From online licensing applications and renewals to electronic record-keeping and communication platforms, the CSLB leverages technology to streamline processes, improve efficiency, and enhance accessibility for contractors and consumers alike. By embracing digital solutions, the CSLB aims to modernize its operations and adapt to the evolving needs of the construction industry.

Continued Focus on Industry Compliance and Integrity

At its core, the CSLB remains committed to upholding industry

compliance and integrity through rigorous oversight and regulation. By enforcing licensing laws, investigating complaints, and disciplining violators, the CSLB works to maintain a level playing field for licensed contractors and protect the public from fraudulent or unethical practices. Through collaboration with industry stakeholders, government agencies, and consumer advocacy groups, the CSLB endeavors to uphold the highest standards of professionalism and accountability in the construction industry.

The California State License Board (CSLB) plays a vital role in regulating the construction industry and safeguarding consumer interests across the state. Through increased enforcement efforts, consumer education and outreach, updates to licensing requirements, embrace of technology, and a continued focus on industry compliance and integrity, the CSLB remains dedicated to promoting fair, safe, and ethical practices in the construction industry. As the industry continues to evolve, the CSLB will continue to adapt and innovate to meet the needs of contractors, consumers, and the public at large.

SAFETY ... IT PAYS



The hazards of lead-acid batteries

Explosive hydrogen...Acidic liquids and vapors...Electrical burns...Strains, sprains, hernias and compressed discs. All of these hazards arise when servicing, charging, or jumping the common lead-acid battery found in cars and trucks. The hazards can be minimized by following a few common sense safety rules.

Eye Protection: First, always wear safety goggles or a face shield when working around a battery. Batteries contain corrosive acids that are capable of eating away metals. It takes just one droplet to cause serious eye damage. Just popping open the vent cap may throw out a droplet. A short or faulty regulator can cause the electrolyte to boil, releasing acid vapors. A fault within the battery could cause it to explode, throwing fragments of the case and acid.

Fire Protection: Lead-acid batteries produce flammable hydrogen gas while



being charged. This highly explosive gas, generated within the cells, will expand and seep out of the vent caps. A cigarette, tool, or spark from any source could ignite the gas, causing the battery to explode. Always charge in a well ventilated area. Remember too that the battery is receiving a charge and releasing hydrogen when the car is running, not just when hooked up to a

battery charger.

Jump Starting: Dead batteries in cars and trucks are not uncommon—particularly in winter. The first thought is to get a jump start. When jumping a battery, remember the following safeguards:

Be sure all electrical equipment is off. If you connect the jumper battery while a load is being drawn, a spark could occur.

Check the battery fluid level. If the plates are exposed, add water until they are covered. Never add acid.

Make sure both batteries are of the same voltage.

Make sure vent caps are in place to prevent electrolyte splash.

Use good quality jumper cables—at least 10-gauge wire.

Always be sure of your polarity when arranging the jumper cables:

Connect the first cable to the positive (+) terminal of the good battery; then attach the other end of that cable to the positive (+) terminal of the dead battery.

Next, attach the second cable to the negative (-) terminal of the good battery, and make the fourth and last connection to a clean metal part, such as the engine block of the car being energized, rather than to its negative battery terminal. This completes the electrical circuit, as if it were connected to the dead battery, but if sparks are produced, it serves to keep them away from any explosive battery gases.

Never lay your tools on top of the battery. They could come in contact with both posts, or the positive post and a ground, creating a short.

OSHA CORNER

Please visit the following address on the web to download helpful safety posters, guides and pamphlets for a safer workplace.

<https://www.osha.gov/publications>



Clean: Get rid of unnecessary supplies

Continued from page 5

- Keep a sufficient stock of office supplies such as pens, paper, notebooks, staplers, and tape to support daily operations. Resupply inventory and restock as needed to avoid running out of essential items.

4. Personalized Items:

- Personalize your workspace with items that inspire and motivate you, such as photos, artwork, or plants. Choose items that contribute positively to your work environment without causing distraction or clutter.

5. Ergonomic Furniture:

- Invest in ergonomic furniture such as chairs, desks, and keyboard trays to support proper posture and minimize the risk of discomfort or injury. Arrange furniture in a way that

promotes efficient workflow and maximizes available space.

What to Toss:

1. Outdated Technology:

- Dispose of outdated technology or equipment that no longer serves a functional purpose. Consider recycling or donating old electronics to minimize environmental impact.

2. Excessive Paperwork:

- Declutter your workspace by purging unnecessary paperwork, old notes, and outdated documents. Implement a digital filing system to organize and archive essential documents, reducing reliance on paper storage.

3. Broken or Unused Items:

- Discard broken or unused items

that take up valuable space in your workspace. Be ruthless in your assessment and remove anything that does not contribute to your productivity or well-being.

4. Distracting Decorations:

- Evaluate decorative items in your workspace and remove any that cause distraction or clutter. Opt for minimalist decor that enhances your focus and creativity without overwhelming your senses.

5. Unnecessary Office Supplies:

- Streamline your office supplies by eliminating items that are rarely used or redundant. Donate excess supplies to colleagues or community organizations to reduce waste and support sustainability efforts.

Hear: Your voice has the power to create change

Continued from page 2

perspectives. By demonstrating respect and empathy in your interactions, you can foster a culture of mutual understanding and collaboration.

6. Request Feedback and Follow Up

Don't be afraid to seek feedback from your employer or colleagues on your ideas, contributions, or performance. Request constructive feedback on how you can improve your communication and effectiveness in the workplace. Follow up on any feedback received and take proactive steps to

address areas for growth or development.

7. Consider Alternative Communication Channels

If traditional communication channels aren't yielding results, consider alternative methods for voicing your concerns or ideas. This may include submitting feedback through anonymous suggestion boxes, participating in employee surveys or focus groups, or utilizing digital communication platforms to share your thoughts.

Feeling unheard in the workplace

can be disheartening, but it's important to remember that your voice matters. By reflecting on your communication style, choosing the right time and place to express yourself, being specific and constructive in your communication, seeking out allies and advocates, using active listening skills, requesting feedback and follow-up, and considering alternative communication channels, employees can navigate feelings of being unheard and advocate for themselves effectively in the workplace. Remember, your voice has the power to effect positive change and contribute to a more inclusive and collaborative work environment.

"The CALIFORNIA CONTRACTOR" is a published bi-monthly newsletter of the Western Regional Master Builders Association. Annual subscription is available with membership in the Western Regional Master Builders Association. For membership information, call (562) 296-8854.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to "Western Regional Master Builders Association" at 12501 Seal Beach Blvd. Suite 250, Seal Beach, CA 90740.