



TOOLBOX TALK ON SPEAKING UP

Presenter notes

AIM

The aim of the toolbox talk is to invite candor from the workforce, to make them understand why this is important and what exactly we expect from them, to understand why they might feel reluctant to speak up and to motivate this speaking up behavior.

This toolbox is developed for the 2022 Global Safety Time Out, but it can be repeated at any time with new teams for instance as a discussion opportunity on Life Saving Rules and as a way to empower people to speak up when they notice dangerous situations or have concerns regarding health and safety.

PREPARING FOR THE TOOLBOX

What to expect

People being candid doesn't happen by magic or overnight. Moreover, there are different influences which can make people reluctant or motivated to speak up. For example, how you are perceived or how subcontractor supervisors are perceived. This toolbox will not create candor instantly and that's perfectly fine because it's not what we would perceive as a successful outcome. Instead this toolbox should be seen as a first exercise to create a climate for candor on which we can build further.

How to do it

In order for the toolbox to have the right effect (at least plant the seeds of a climate of candor), it needs to be highly interactive. That means that you'll have to do less "telling" and more "asking". Situational humility is in other words key in the exercise: the answers have to come in the first place from the team, not from you. Your job is to guide the thought process. This support document will help you with that. You'll notice that the questions will lead the team's thought process in the direction that we want. You'll also notice that a good number of scenario's and possible answers already have been developed, so you can use those to prepare yourself.

This highly interactive setting with guided questions works best when you have smaller groups. So if you have the possibility to organize the toolbox talks in such a way, that would be ideal. You might also want to prepare the toolbox with (subcontractor) supervisors by discussing the aim and purpose before you actually do the toolbox. If supervisors are clicking with the concepts and strategy and they would like to lead the discussions themselves, please give them the floor: this is very powerful.

We also recommend you to read the Leadership toolkit chapter in the BESIX Field Guide to Subcontractor Engagement.

INTRODUCING THE TOPIC

Introduce the topic by stating that at BESIX health and safety starts from a care principle: we care about people that work on our sites. This is very important because our industry is faced with quite a lot of challenges: critical risks, last minute changes, pressure of planning and budget, ... Plus, all of us are part of one big team: we all have an important role to play in not only the successful delivery of our work, but also in the safety of our teams. Tell the team that you would like to have an open talk/dialogue with them on what challenges they meet in their daily work (especially with regard to health and safety) and what we all can do to keep everyone safe. Tell the team that you're "not here to give instructions, but to listen to them." Tell the team that the aim of the toolbox is to learn from each other and that there are no "wrong" questions or answers. A way to say that is: "There are no wrong questions. Answers can be right and answers can be wrong, but as long as we understand why an answer is wrong, it's also a right answer, because we've learned something from it."

QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1: WHAT IS SAFE BEHAVIOR?

This might seem like a rhetorical question and the answer to this question might seem obvious, but it's really not. The aim of the question is to make people think about the complexity of their work in terms of health and safety.

Possible answer 1: "It's when we don't have accidents."

- Thank the group for the answer and explore this answer further. Is having no accidents safe behavior or is it the result of safe behavior? It is obviously the result, but let the team come up with that answer themselves.
- Next, ask the team if they think that if we don't have accidents, we're being safe / behaving safely. Again, let the team discuss, but the bottom line is that having no accidents doesn't automatically mean that we're safe. We can be just lucky for instance and the next time we're not so lucky, we'll have an accident.
- Challenge the team by asking what "safe behavior" looks like in practice, ask for examples from their own work. Most likely they will come up with a number of examples of people following the safety rules. This will lead you to possible answer 2.

Possible answer 2: "It's when people respect the safety rules."

- Acknowledge the answer and move on to question 2 by introducing the Life Saving Rules, which are the most critical rules that we have. Note: we suggest to focus on the Life Saving Rules, because it will make the group exercise go quite smoothly, but feel free to discuss any safety rules which are important to the team.

QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE THE LIFE SAVING RULES THAT ARE APPLICABLE TO THIS PROJECT (OR YOUR SPECIFIC ACTIVITY)?

If the team can name them all, this is excellent. If they can't, take some time to go through them by explaining what they mean in terms of expectations for the team. Focus first on the behaviors that are expected. For instance with Life Saving Rule 1 that would be protecting yourself when you work at height in general and more specifically.

If you feel the need, you can talk with the team why we have these Life Saving Rules (so why they're important and in fact a "special" set of rules).

QUESTION 3: EVEN THOUGH THAT LIFE SAVING RULES ARE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT, IS IT ALWAYS EASY OR EVEN POSSIBLE TO FOLLOW THEM AT ALL TIMES?

Our policy regarding Life Saving Rules is crystal clear: we want "100% compliance", meaning that we will not compromise on them. At first sight, there's no ambiguity regarding this expectation. But "100% compliance" does not simply mean that the rule should be followed blindly at all times and that there's not a single instance where the rule cannot be applied. This is the difference between "work as imagined" and "work as done": the rule is simple, applying the rule in practice isn't always that simple. In order to be "100% compliant" we should also be conscious of the reality of the workplace and the activity. By accepting that variation exists, we build in resilience which is key to assuring this compliance. This is the underlying strategy of this question: to invite people to talk about the variability and complexity of their work.

- If the team answers "yes, it's easy and possible to follow the Life Saving Rule(s) at all times", chances are that they're giving you the "socially desired" answer. Keep digging when this answer surfaces. Not to find support for your opinion, but to open people's minds and help the thinking process and the discussion.
- If the team doesn't share instances in the past when they were forced to take a shortcut, ask them about the work which is planned in the next days and weeks: where do they see issues or difficulties to ensure "100% compliance". If you have a white board at your disposal, write down what the team's feedback. This is important and valuable information.
- If the team still doesn't share examples, you will need to reframe the question by telling a story about someone not being able to follow a simple and critical safety rule. Either you tell a story from your own experience, or you can use the following story. *"I'd like you to imagine the following environment: we're not anymore on our construction site, but we're doing road works on a busy highway. Some of the lanes have been closed for the works, but others remain open to allow the*

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traffic to pass. The most critical risk is obviously being hit by a passing car or truck. The rule on this construction site is crystal clear: it is forbidden at all times to cross an open lane with passing traffic. No compromise can be made on this. But at a certain moment, a worker is observed crossing an open lane anyway. He reaches the other side safe and sound, so there's no accident. Actually, when he crossed, there was no or little oncoming traffic." Now ask the team the following questions:

- What do you think of this situation? Was it what you would call safe behavior? If the answer is "yes, because he assessed the risk before he crossed: there was no or little oncoming traffic.", acknowledge and ask a follow-up question: is it then OK to break a rule which is so important that we said we would aim for "100% compliance."?
- What do you think the reaction of the supervisor or project manager should be in this situation? And why? Let the team debate and acknowledge all opinions. If the answer "they should first of all talk to the worker and find out why he broke the rule" isn't mentioned, ask the following question.
- Why did the worker break the rule by crossing the open lane? You will probably get different answers here. Write down the answers on the white board and ask for every reason why that the team comes up with what the course of action then should be. You might get the following:
 - The worker didn't know the rule – Then we should explain it or train the worker.
 - The worker honestly didn't see the risk because there was little to no traffic – Then we should explain the reason why we have this important rule.
 - The worker took a shortcut because he was lazy/careless/... – Then we should sanction him.
 - The worker might not have another option because there was no safe way to cross (bridge, ...) – Then we should look at how we can make a safe crossing.
 - The worker was pressured by his boss because he had a deadline to meet – Maybe then we should also have a talk with the boss about putting people at risk.

The conclusion of this question, whichever of the above scenario's you apply with the team, should be that some rules might ne simple, but respecting these rules is sometimes difficult (or maybe even impossible) for different reasons. This conclusion should be made explicitly with the team because it will lead to the next question.

QUESTION 4: IF LIFE SAVING RULES ARE TO BE RESPECTED AT ALL TIMES, BUT YOU FIND YOURSELF IN A SITUATION WHERE – FOR WHATEVER REASON – IT’S NOT POSSIBLE TO DO SO, WHAT SHOULD YOU DO THEN?

Let the team debate, but the answer you’re looking for is “stop the work and find a solution first”. Tell the team that this is also mentioned expressly in our policy regarding the Life Saving Rules: everyone has the duty to stop works when a Life Saving Rule cannot be respected. In a number of countries this expectation even goes beyond the local legal requirement as the law often states that people have the right to stop works when safety cannot be assured. Explain that at BESIX we care about people and that we want to avoid (fatal) accidents at all costs. This is why we go further than what is often required by law regarding the authority to stop works. This is an important part of the “100% compliance” we’re pursuing.

QUESTION 5: HOW EASY IS IT TO MAKE A STOP WORK DECISION?

In principle this should be easy since our policy is crystal clear on the stop work authority (it’s a duty, not just a right). But is that also the reality? Gaining insight on this, is the reason we ask this question. The answers the team will give you, will be very valuable to identify thresholds which make people reluctant to speak up, even when lives are at stake. For shaping a climate in which people can be engaged in health and safety, this is important to know.

For this question you might need to ask additional questions to reframe and to get the right answers.

- Have you ever stopped the work because it was not safe? Can you share your story on this? What happened and how was the situation made safe?
- Have you ever felt that the work wasn’t 100% safe (or safe at all), but you didn’t speak up? Why didn’t you?
- Can you think of situations (on this project for instance) where it might be important to make the decision to stop (or not begin) the work, but where it might not be so easy to do so? Why is that? Note: you can also ask this question about past situations, either on the project or on another project.

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QUESTION 6: WHAT WOULD YOU NEED TO EASILY MAKE STOP WORK DECISIONS?

Ask the team to imagine a perfect world in which stop work decisions are made without hesitation when critical risks are at stake. What would such a world look like in practice? How would people take the time to look at the work to be carried out and also the work location? How would challenges and issues be discussed?

The aim of the question is to let people brainstorm about solutions to things that inhibit speaking up. If you have a white board at your disposal, write the answers down (or note them down on a piece of paper). This sends the message to the team that you're valuing their input.

After the feedback, thank the team for their contributions and tell them that they've shared some valuable ideas. Tell them that you will use at least some of these ideas (you even might want to highlight them) on short term to help create a climate in which everyone feels empowered to speak up (even more) when health and safety is at stake.

BONUS QUESTION

If you notice that the team is very open in giving feedback, you might want to ask an additional question to challenge the team. The question is very straightforward and will invite the team to think critically. But be aware: it might come across as confronting and as said: you will need sufficient candor and good intent to get valuable answers. The question is the following:

On this site, what is the next accident we will have, where will it happen and why?

Asking this question will lead to a group discussion on hazards and dangerous situations. It can provide valuable feedback provided that answers are motivated by an intent to improve and not an intent to just complain.

AFTER THE TOOLBOX

A very important part of the entire exercise happens after the toolbox itself. Collect all the feedback from the teams and debrief with the site team on what you've learned. This should be the basis of site specific actions to further improve the climate for candor on site and to motivate people to speak up.

Equally important is to give feedback to the teams afterwards. Be transparent about the "ideas that made it" and explain why certain ideas or suggestions cannot or will not be put into practice in short term or at all. This is important to make people feel that their feedback is appreciated and valued.