

HUMAN BEHAVIOR AND INDUSTRIAL SAFETY

evaluate in advance the consequences of action.

Motivational effect of emotion

Not all emotion leads to maladjustive behavior. Under certain circumstances, mild emotion can work the same way as do motivational factors to elicit desired activity. Giving recognition for a good safety record makes an individual happy and desirous of carrying on such excellent work. An individual who is angry after a slight from his supervisor may become motivated to be more proficient on his job, or take up further training to become a supervisor just to show his boss that he can do it. There are a multitude of examples of emotional reactions which have worked for the benefit of the individual.

In spite of this, one must be aware that strong emotional reactions can have very undesirable results. It is important that there should be few threats, slights, and reprimands of a kind that stirs up emotions, and more attempts to keep individuals calm and the work atmosphere free of tension. The net result will be in the asset column.

Be a good listener

While no attempt can be made here to train safety directors or foremen to become personnel counselors, it should be pointed out that there is something they can do to help reduce the immediate result of strong emotion. The foreman is in the best position to evaluate the emotional level of an individual worker and to do something about it.

Everyone is familiar with the emotional outbursts of people who have had a trying and upsetting experience. Such expression of emotion may take many forms from an outburst of invective, a torrent of tears, to physical assault on inanimate objects which can't strike back. The

end result is the same, relief from the intolerable tension, and emotional relaxation.

To reduce the strength of the emotional response, the foreman can engage in what may be called *permissive listening*, that is, giving the employee an opportunity to talk about the thing which is bothering him. This freedom to say what the individual pleases can reduce tension which might lead to distraction and accidents.

It is important that the supervisor not attempt to evaluate or judge the employee's remarks. The employee needs an opportunity to "blow off steam" without retaliation or evaluation.

The stresses which cause emotional upset can occur within the plant or away from the plant, but each kind has its effect on the other. A simple statement, such as "How are you today?" or "What's bothering you?," may well be sufficient to set off the safety valve of verbalization of pent-up emotion. After the discussion, the employee can often evaluate more clearly and realistically the things that upset him in the first place.

This relationship between the supervisor and the worker must be one of the supervisor's normal everyday functions. Thorough observation and effective and sensitive listening should be tools of every supervisor.



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