

## 5 types of supervisors that sabotage your efforts

### ◆ And what to do about their negative behaviors

**C**ompany owner: “So why didn’t that last safety initiative deliver as promised?”

Safety director: “We had problems with a few supervisors.”

The exchange above is a familiar story to many safety directors. That’s because supervisors can make or break a safety program, says consultant Peter Greaney, a physician specializing in occupational medicine.

Greaney says your initiatives will go much farther if you know to deal with the following five types of supervisors:

#### 1. THE SUGAR-COATER

This supervisor consistently reports zero injuries in his department. But if you dig deeper, you may find he’s misclassifying injuries or not documenting them at all.

For example, he may misclassify a sprained ankle as an injury requiring only first aid. That’s because he doesn’t want a lost-workday tarnishing his department’s injury record.

*Suggestion:* Review the reportable injury rules with the supervisor. Investigate his injury logs until you trust his reporting. If you persistently discover skewed numbers even after retraining, consider progressive discipline. Also, refrain from setting “zero injury goals” – which may pressure supervisors into fudging numbers.

#### 2. THE BUCK-PASSER

This supervisor doesn’t feel it’s his job to handle worker injuries. Any time

a worker gets hurt, he ships workers off to HR – to let them deal with it.

For example: If a worker receives an injury – this supervisor may look at it, call HR, and figure his job is done.

*Suggestion:* Determine if the supervisor can’t be bothered, or is simply outside his comfort zone in administering first aid. Remind the supervisor on the importance of response in the first hour (which may be too late for HR to respond effectively.) That first hour usually forecasts how smoothly the situation will pan out – from medical costs to the worker’s return to the job. Also, consider re-training the supervisor in first aid until it’s within his comfort zone.

#### 3. THE CLOSET-LAWYER

This supervisor is afraid of taking any action when an employee is injured, for fear of lawsuits. He’s been educated on regulations by watching crime TV shows and reading up on workers comp cases over the Internet. *Example:* This boss may skip looping HR into an injury, because he’s afraid of violating privacy laws.

*Solution:* Organize a meeting with the supervisor, yourself and HR. Discuss why it’s critical HR is made aware of workers’ injuries. They are the in-house experts on employment law – and it is their job to prevent lawsuits.

#### 4. THE GRUDGE-HOLDER

This boss doesn’t like one worker so much he doesn’t care if that worker is out because of injury or illness. He’s always lobbying to send some workers

home and he’s never much help bringing them back. *Example:* If you ask this boss to call an injured worker at home, to see how she’s feeling – he’ll probably “forget.”

*Suggestion:* Develop a plan for the supervisor’s role in bringing employees back to work. And periodically check that he’s carrying out his responsibilities.

#### 5. THE DOCTOR

This supervisor has a stash of first aid supplies that makes a doctor’s office look bare. He has his own ice packs, dressings and butterfly bandages. Each time one of his workers has an ailment, he administers first aid, and then sends them back to work.

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### *Monitor the supplies*

#### *‘the doctor’ uses*

#### *for first aid.*

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*Example:* If a worker obtains a rash from epoxies, this supervisor will just dab some drug store-purchased cortizone on it, problem solved.

*Solution:* Require this supervisor to obtain medical supplies from you, or an authorized provider. Prohibit “ad hoc” purchases. That way you can monitor what supplies he uses on employees. Then make a list for him of the types of first aid practices he’s allowed to handle – such as passing out band-aids and cold tablets.

*Source: Peter Greaney, MD, president, WorkCare, Inc., 800-455-6155, www.workcare.com*