

CATERPILLAR SAFETY SERVICES

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Coaching leaders - Training supervisors - Engaging employees



EXPEDITION TO EXCELLENCE: Dolese Bros. Co.

When leaders at Dolese Bros. Co. dared to consider whether they were really doing everything possible to keep employees safe, they found an opportunity to embrace a new approach that will deliver improvements and reduce risk throughout the business.

Advancing Core Values

More than a decade has passed since long-time company leader Roger Dolese's death, but his legacy as a conservationist endures. Under Mr. Dolese's leadership, nature would not be compromised for business growth. If the most efficient path to prosperity was through a tree, he demanded a work-around. His successors remain true that conviction and to this day scrutinize every project accordingly.

"When I first came here, I was in a meeting and suggested clearing some trees in order to help production in one of our plants," said Mark Helm, CEO. "I thought I was going to get strung up, that I would even mention such a thing."

The tone Mr. Dolese set from the top has become a model for Helm and the management team, who are committed to setting another cultural norm for the company: No task is worth doing if it can't be done safely.

"If we emphasize safety with the same passion that Mr. Dolese had for conservation, imagine the impact we can have on employees, the business and the community," said Gaylan Towle, Safety

Director. "Decades from now employees will know that working safely is the only way Dolese does business."

About seven months into Dolese's journey to zero-incident performance, guided by Caterpillar Safety Services, employees are making strides in developing a culture relentlessly committed to protecting people and the environment.

Engaging Employees

The journey began with a Safety Perception Survey, through which all employees were given the opportunity to share their perspectives about the current safety culture. The results were used to determine on which areas the company would focus its improvement efforts. Caterpillar's Zero-Incident Performance (ZIP) Process is about driving quality into routine activities that impact safety and operational performance, embedding accountability into every system.

Shortly after the survey results were delivered, a Safety Steering Team was formed to build a strategic plan for sustainable improvement and support teams of hourly employees in the development of new or improved processes. The first Continuous Improvement (CI) Team built an improved system for Catwalk Conversations, or safety meetings. Ryan McClanahan, a painter in the general shop and one of the team members, embraced the opportunity to "freshen up" a system that had been disseminating impersonal safety material over and over in a static format for decades.

"This was a really big deal, very exciting, for everyone on the team," McClanahan said. "It was the only time I've ever seen upper management ask for hourly employee input, but it made sense. We're the ones ultimately seeing and dealing with the issues."

The team's solution redefined the way the entire company approaches safety meetings, yet built flexibility into the system so that each division can develop a format that suits its unique work environment. In the general shop, meeting topics are no longer assigned by supervisors.

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Rather, they are selected by the employee presenters and are often inspired by current news events, such as a truck accident, which relate to work at Dolese.

The flexibility in topics and variance in presenters has resulted in more thoughtful conversations driven by outside-the-box, critical thinking. "We've done Catwalk Conversations about housekeeping at least six times this year, but it's a completely different meeting each time because we all see things a little differently," McClanahan said. "That's my favorite part of it, having involvement from everybody else."

At Hartshorne Quarry, safety meetings have gone from infrequent, lengthy gatherings of large groups to near-daily exchanges that may take just a few minutes but are much more interactive and relevant to the work at hand.

"Under our previous system, supervisors were asked to deliver an hour's worth material they weren't really familiar with, so it was a challenge for them and for all the employees who were expected to actively listen," Melvin Barks, Superintendent, Hartshorne Quarry. "What I like about this new system is it isn't focused on compliance; it's about compassion. Talking at a timely moment about what's going to keep us safe today."

Success Breeds Success

In Dolese's evolving safety system, each level of the company has specific, defined accountabilities for keeping the improvement momentum going strong. The Safety Steering Team established a purpose statement early in the journey, resolving to "Become the industry leader in safety by positively engaging all levels of the Dolese family in implementing a sustainable strategy that improves our safety culture." The team meets regularly to check the status of projects, remove obstacles that could impede success and ensure continuous improvement activities tie back to the purpose statement.

The improved Catwalk Conversations CI Team system is now in place in several locations and will soon be rolled out company-wide. In a few months the team will conduct an employee survey to determine whether the changes are indeed making a positive impact on the culture. If not, the team will make necessary adjustments until its desired results can be achieved. However, McClanahan has no doubts the survey feedback will illustrate success.

"At least in my area, the general shop, we wanted a change," McClanahan said. "There hasn't been any resistance at all. In fact, people who avoided leading meetings now say they like doing them, maybe because now the point is more about looking beyond the page, having a real discussion."

Once the Catwalk Conversation system is fully refined, the Steering Team will gather a second group of hourly employees to focus on another activity that impacts safety performance and the improvement process will repeat. Along the way supervisors and managers are participating in various workshops to develop skills to effectively manage safety and support the CI Team solutions on the front line.

"It's not just about growth of the business; it's growth in the quality of employees, an investment in our people that will help them meet our goals," Helm said. "We've never pushed the initiative on employees to come up with solutions. It's been whatever management says needs to be done is what gets done. That's the shift we're trying to make, and if we're going to get better as a company and grow, we have to have that shift."

The successes employees achieve in safety through the ZIP Process will establish a sustainable spirit of continuous improvement and a framework for advancing operational objectives.

"Safety is our launching point because everyone agrees that safety is important," Helm said. "But I really think we'll use it to more effectively manage other parts of our business moving forward."

Though Helm and management shy away from the notion that their work today will establish a lasting legacy as strong as Mr. Dolese's commitment to conservation, they recognize the company is at a critical crossroads with an opportunity to make sustainable change that improves the Dolese image, grows the business and, most importantly, delivers employees home safely every day.

"I don't necessarily want to be remembered 10 years after I leave for my role in this, because I'm just one of all these people who are moving us forward," Helm said. "When I leave I want Dolese to be better than when I came in – better at safety, better at productivity, better at customer service – and be committed to continuous improvement. That takes all of us." ■