

STRONG SAFETY CULTURE

Best Practices

The Short Line Safety Institute (“SLSI”) has adopted the U.S. Department of Transportation Safety Council’s definition of a strong safety culture. A strong safety culture is defined as “the shared values, actions, and behaviors that demonstrate a commitment to safety over competing goals and demands.”

TEN CORE ELEMENTS OF A STRONG SAFETY CULTURE

1. Leadership Is Clearly Committed to Safety

The importance of leadership in fostering a strong safety culture is indicated by the fact that almost all safety culture models explicitly mention leadership’s commitment to safety. Leaders across all layers of a railroad must model safety-first attitudes and behaviors. Employees learn what the accepted practices are in a railroad by following the examples set by its leaders.

BEST PRACTICES	EXAMPLES and RATIONALE	TOOLS
Conduct Town Hall Meetings with Senior Leadership	<p>Schedule town hall meetings and attend job safety briefings and safety committee meetings. Having meetings at least twice a year and preferably quarterly will emphasize their importance and demonstrate leadership’s commitment to safety. Try scheduling meetings to maximize attendance.</p> <p>Regular engagement with employees allows for communication regarding safety-related information and the status of the railroad. Employees will also have the opportunity to communicate any issues and concerns to management.</p>	
Encourage Management Field Presence and Contact with the Workforce	<p>Develop a schedule for consistent field contacts on all shifts and days, including at reporting locations, to keep employees engaged, ensure consistency and provide two-way feedback. It also promotes common understanding of strategy and goals and a positive attitude.</p> <p>Having railroad managers present in the field as work is being performed is important, and field presence planning should be incorporated into each manager’s performance goals.</p>	
Model Safe Practices	<p>Ensure managers practice rigorous rules compliance and demonstrate best safety practices, such as wearing all required PPE. Employees may not notice when a manager wears PPE, but they will remember when a manager does not.</p>	<p>Sample PPE Matrix:</p> <p>SLSI Sample PPE Matrix</p>

2. The Railroad Practices Continuous Learning

Maintaining a strong safety culture necessitates a learning environment where opportunities to improve safety are continuously sought out and implemented. Railroads must be open to learning from accidents when they do happen and willing to make changes to prevent incidents in the future.

BEST PRACTICES	EXAMPLES and RATIONALE	TOOLS
<p>Have a Formal Process for Accident or Incident Investigation Utilizing Root-Cause Analysis</p>	<p>Having a formal incident or accident investigation protocol in place ensures incidents or accidents are consistently investigated on factual basis. The formal process helps reduce bias or pre-determined judgement. Incorporating a formal root-cause analysis component ensures that the root cause(s) are identified.</p> <p>A formal process is a more effective learning tool than an informal process because it provides specific tools and suggestions to use to prevent incidents and accidents recurrence. A good root-cause analysis model avoids placing blame, and instead provides a methodical approach to determining cause(s) that can be eliminated to prevent recurrence.</p>	
<p>Create a Way to Share Lessons Learned from Other Railroads</p>	<p>Sharing “lessons learned” from incidents or accidents, including those on other railroads, and engaging employees in discussions about the incidents or accidents supports increased awareness in the workplace.</p> <p>There are many sources for this information. It can be posted on employee bulletin boards. A presentation or video can be looped on monitors or open discussions can be held at job safety briefings.</p>	<p>Online Resources:</p> <p>ASLRRA Safety and Training Committee FRA website Other industry groups or associations</p>
<p>Develop and Implement a Safety Action Plan (SAP)</p>	<p>The SAP should be developed and shared with management and employees to solicit their feedback and gain commitment. The SAP should reflect realistic expectations for safety-related performance in each department and can include such topics as auditing, accountability, employee involvement, communication plans and safety training.</p> <p>When creating an SAP, consider involving employees from each craft and communicate to employees that the plan will: identify safety performance history; outline obstacles to a safe operation; specify risk mitigation techniques; and assign responsibilities for implementation of each component. Involving employees in the SAP development process is essential, as having ownership and feeling personally responsible for safety are keys to enhancing safety performance.</p>	<p>SAP template:</p> <p>SLSI Safety Action Plan Template</p>

3. Decisions Demonstrate that Safety Is Prioritized Over Competing Demands

An organization with a strong safety culture uses decision-making processes demonstrating that safety is prioritized over competing demands. Railroads with a strong safety culture will consistently choose safety over performance when faced with the choice of cutting corners to increase performance.

BEST PRACTICES	EXAMPLES and RATIONALE	TOOLS
<p>Hold Meetings with All Employees</p>	<p>Depending on railroad size, meetings can be held at a single on-duty point or even via conference call. Making meetings interactive and relevant prevents them from being brushed off as a waste of time. Consider having different employees present topics daily as a way to promote engagement.</p>	
<p>Conduct a Job Safety Analysis (JSA) at Daily Job Briefings</p>	<p>A JSA integrates accepted safety and health principles and practices into a particular task or job operation. In a JSA, each basic step of the job is analyzed to identify potential hazards and to recommend the safest way to do the job. Utilize this daily when conducting job briefings</p>	<p>Various JSA Templates: Job Hazard Analysis Form</p>
<p>Create Job Aids for Different Locations as Safety Reminders</p>	<p>Job aids help people complete tasks and avoid making mistakes. They can be written, have illustrations, or be a combination of both. Common examples are recipes, instruction manuals, instruction cards and memory joggers.</p> <p>Create job aids for customer locations to familiarize less experienced with hazards at each location, or as a refresher for seasoned employees. For example, utilizing screenshots from computer/satellite mapping programs makes it easy to maintain scale. Solicit input from employees familiar with each location for safest and most efficient practices. Add notations as applicable and make available to employees as necessary.</p>	



4. Reporting Systems and Accountability Are Clearly Defined

Organizations must ensure that reporting systems and lines of accountability are in place so that safety issues can be promptly identified, fully evaluated, and addressed and corrected commensurate with their significance.

BEST PRACTICES	EXAMPLES	TOOLS
<p>Encourage Reporting of Safety Concerns</p>	<p>Employees should be able to easily report safety concerns to management. When an issue is important enough for an employee to bring to management's attention, give the employee and the safety concern full attention. Respectful listening is essential, and dealing with employee problems and concerns is not a work interruption. It is part of a manager or supervisor's responsibilities.</p> <p>Consider what methods are currently used to facilitate reporting. Many tools exist for efficient reporting of safety concerns beyond verbal communication and email. Consider using white boards, anonymous suggestion boxes or even appointing designated employees who bring concerns to management.</p>	
<p>Track Steps Taken When Handling Safety Concerns</p>	<p>Concerns reported by employees should be investigated and resolved promptly. Dealing with reported concerns consistently and transparently will help increase trust, which will further encourage employees identify their safety concerns.</p> <p>Track reported issues by some means to ensure consistency, accountability, resolution and employee feedback. Enable employees to see what has been reported, what has been corrected and what actions are planned. Tracking can be done by posting an electronic or paper list of actions taken, timelines for completion, and resolutions. Information can also be shared via white boards, computer spreadsheets or other programs.</p>	<p>Sample Tracking Template:</p> <p>SLSI Safety Issue Tracking Template</p>
<p>Write and Share a Safety Action Plan</p>	<p>A Safety Action Plan (SAP) is a written document recognizing the safety history of a railroad. It includes a railroad's current conditions and identified hazards, and makes plans to minimize risks and assign accountability. The SAP is sort of a road map. It tells where the railroad has been, where it is now, where it is going, and the plan to reach the intended goal.</p>	<p>Sample Template:</p> <p>SLSI Safety Action Plan Template</p>

5. There Is a Safety-Conscious Work Environment

Maintaining a strong safety culture requires constant vigilance and an elevated awareness of the importance of safety. Employees should be encouraged to raise safety concerns and provided opportunities to raise concerns through reporting systems and procedures.

BEST PRACTICES	EXAMPLES and RATIONALE	TOOLS
<p>Use Visual Clearance Aids, Signs and Markers</p>	<p>Utilization of visual aids removes guess work out of backing or shoving movements and may help to standardize car count and distance measurements across the workforce. These items and methods can be used to clearly mark fouling points and line of sight clearance points for placement or storage of rolling stock on tracks adjacent to mainlines at public grade crossings. Include MOW and T&E employees in the planning to take their ideas into consideration and foster cross-functional understanding.</p> <p>For example, track signs, markers and painted clearance points designating car counts or distance in feet to end of track, wheel stops, bumpers or signals can be helpful. Such signs and markers can indicate these distances in car lengths such as 5, 10 or 15 and/or increments in feet as may be specified by the railroad.</p> <p>Use high visibility paint for rail and/or ties (yellow tie program) or use other items like rubberized or metallic cones or stanchions designed to be permanently affixed to ties between rail gauge. Also, use measuring tapes or measuring wheels to ensure accurate placement of visual aids.</p>	<p>Sample Visual Aids:</p>  
<p>Maintain an Open-Door Policy to Facilitate Reporting</p>	<p>Managers who maintain a high level of accessibility and express a willingness to discuss any topic establish an environment where communication flows more freely, employees have quicker access to information and working relationships become closer and stronger. Closed doors may inhibit employees from consulting with a manager when faced with an urgent matter. When managers are not immediately available, white boards or suggestion boxes are a good way for employees to note issues or concerns.</p>	
<p>Allow Employees to Lead Job Safety Briefings on a Rotating Basis</p>	<p>Interactive, employee-led job safety briefings are more likely to keep the participants' attention.</p> <p>Characteristics of interactive briefings include: being led by employees and rotated through the workforce on a daily or weekly basis; using examples such as past experiences, safety alerts, industry and company incident reports and statistics; soliciting input from attendees as to possible causes of an incident and actions that might have mitigated risks.</p>	<p>Sample Briefing Guidelines:</p> <p>SLSI Sample Job Safety Briefing Form</p> <p>SLSI Sample MOW-Signal Job Safety Briefing</p> <p>SLSI Sample Transportation Job Safety Briefing</p> <p>SLSI Sample Mechanical Job Safety Briefing</p>

6. Employees Feel Personally Responsible for Safety

Employees who feel personally responsible for safety take more ownership in following safety procedures and are also more likely to speak up when they see other employees behaving in an unsafe manner. Personal responsibility empowers employees and helps the entire organization identify and correct risks proactively. For the SLSI, empowerment means ensuring employees have the skills, knowledge, resources and authority to make safe choices within an acceptable range of options.

BEST PRACTICES	EXAMPLES	TOOLS
<p>Hold Employee Contests to Develop Safety Slogans</p>	<p>Consider holding periodic contests to develop safety slogans and involve all employees to encourage creative ways to display safety reminders. Each selected slogan could be prominently displayed and include the contributor's name, with awards or other recognition given to winners.</p>	
<p>Empower Employees to Make Safe Decisions</p>	<p>Employees who are empowered are allowed to think, behave and take safe and appropriate actions based upon their knowledge and skills in autonomous, independent, and self-directed ways. Empowered employees typically work more efficiently, safely, responsibly and are more personally accountable.</p> <p>Managers can improve employee empowerment by taking the opportunity to coach, mentor, train and praise employees, and should be educated in the application of such techniques. Non-management mentors can also improve employee knowledge and skills, and mentoring programs help maximize the knowledge and technical skills of selected mentors.</p>	

7. There Is Open and Effective Communication Across the Railroad

Employees must feel comfortable communicating with their supervisors about safety issues and communicating with their peers when they see unsafe behaviors. If the railroad is not communicating the importance of safety and encouraging employees to speak up about safety, safety risks are more likely to develop and less likely to be addressed before an accident occurs.

BEST PRACTICES	EXAMPLES and RATIONALE	TOOLS
<p>Communicate Via Electronic Information Boards or Standardized Bulletin Boards</p>	<p>Bulletin boards can encourage teamwork, quality work and job safety among employees. They can also be used to promote employee recognition and feedback.</p> <p>Whether a flat-screen TV, computer monitor, white board or old-fashioned cork, bulletin boards provide railroads with the opportunity to disperse timely and important information to workforces. Having a standardized bulletin board layout provides uniform information, even when there are multiple boards in multiple on-duty locations. Consider designating specific employees to monitor the boards and ensure information is kept current and consistent.</p>	
<p>Schedule One-on-One Meetings and Annual Reviews Between Leaders and Employees</p>	<p>Leaders are coaches seeking the best performance from their teams. Feedback is the key to superior performance, as long as leaders are properly trained to provide quality feedback.</p> <p>One-on-one meetings give leaders the opportunity to provide feedback to employees, reinforcing positive behaviors and improving the chances of correcting unsatisfactory behaviors. One-on-one meetings can create a more connected environment and lead to increased trust between leaders and employees.</p>	
<p>Use Company Assigned Laptops or Tablets with Rules, Policies, Procedures and Other Functions</p>	<p>In addition to car management functions, company-assigned laptops or tablets can provide employees with immediate access to company rules, policies and procedures. Posting rules of the day or week on the devices creates enhanced opportunities for employees to discuss them during job briefings, and quizzes for identified rules can be incorporated on each device. Use of these devices encourages employees to interact with rules in a different way, which can increase knowledge.</p>	
<p>Encourage Routine Safety Communication</p>	<p>Communication allows safety leaders to instill a sense of mission in employees. Employees need to understand what safety means to the organization and to them as an individual.</p> <p>The use of recent industry or company incidents are great tools to engage employees. A manager can describe an incident, then ask employees questions like: What could have been done to avoid this incident? What ideas do employees have that would mitigate the risks involved to ensure the incident never occurs again?</p>	

8. Mutual Trust Is Fostered between Employees and the Railroad

One of the cornerstones of any positive organizational culture is trust. Trust between all railroad employees, from craft employees to senior leaders, can go a long way in supporting safety by facilitating open and honest communication and minimizing fears of reprisal. Employees who have developed a relationship of trust with their supervisors may feel more willing to raise safety concerns in novel situations when they are unsure of how the railroad might respond.

BEST PRACTICES	EXAMPLES and RATIONALE	TOOLS
<p>Have Employees Accompany Managers During Operational Tests</p>	<p>Employees can accompany a manager during normal routine operational testing. This will allow employees to better understand the purpose of the testing program and the meaning of the rules being tested.</p> <p>Working together in this manner can bring about a higher level of mutual trust. Still, always refer to the company's operational testing program to ensure all guidelines are being followed.</p>	
<p>Schedule Frequent Open "Tailgate" Sessions Between Managers and Employees</p>	<p>Use 10 to 15-minute field visits to discuss a specific rule or practice with a crew. Have the crew talk about responses to a given situation.</p> <p>Develop scripts for managers to use during sessions each week or month to ensure a consistent message across the property.</p>	<p>Sample Meeting Scripts:</p>
<p>Create Safety Committees</p>	<p>Create a safety committee policy that defines roles and responsibilities for safety committee members, and solicit feedback from representatives in all departments, including management. Because they are involved in development of the policy, employees may feel further empowered to say something if they witness unsafe acts or behaviors.</p> <p>Allow employees to lead committees. Communicate the committee's existence, structure, and function to employees and share the minutes from the committee meetings to encourage an atmosphere of open communication and continuous learning for all levels of the organization.</p>	<p>Sample Committee Policy:</p> <p>SLSI Sample Safety Committee Policy</p>

9. The Railroad Is Fair and Consistent in Responding to Safety Concerns

Above and beyond having effective reporting procedures and processes in place, the railroad must respond to safety concerns in a manner that employees perceive as fair, just, and consistent. Employees should feel free to raise safety concerns without fear of retaliation.

BEST PRACTICES	EXAMPLES and RATIONALE	TOOLS
<p>Have an Effective Discipline Policy</p>	<p>Effective discipline policies use rules and practices to enhance the abilities and performance of workers. A good policy focuses on correcting undesirable behavior, not punishment. Increased education, training and structured mentoring are examples of effective discipline, and the best discipline policies feature progressive consequences to address repeat behavior.</p> <p>Policies should be written, easy to understand and made available to all employees to allow them to live up to expectations.</p>	<p>Sample Discipline Policy:</p> <p>SLSI Sample Progressive Discipline Policy</p>
<p>Use Recognition Programs for Encouragement</p>	<p>Recognition programs should be designed to encourage and reward participation in various activities that build upon the railroad's safety culture and help to improve safety performance.</p>	<p>Guidance Regarding Incentive Programs:</p> <p>OSHA Memorandum</p>

10. Training and Resources Are Available to Support Safety

Those who manage and operate the system must have current knowledge of all human, technical, organizational and environmental factors affecting the safety of the whole system, and have tools and equipment available to perform their job duties in the safest manner possible. In addition, the organization must ensure that the personnel, procedures, and other resources needed to ensure safety are available. Understaffing safety-critical positions or not having formal, written procedures for ensuring safety can be just as detrimental as a lack of physical equipment.

BEST PRACTICES	EXAMPLES and RATIONALE	TOOLS
Implement Structured Training Curriculums	Effective training programs clearly identify the group of employees to which the program applies, and are tailored toward specific groups. Effective programs provide training required by both entry-level and experienced employees, and any other specialized training necessary. Training curriculum should detail the instructional content and the requirements for demonstrating fluency and competency.	
Utilize Computer-based Training	Computer-based training modules have many advantages. Instructional materials are presented to each participant in the same format, the same style and at the same time intervals, and employee records are easier to maintain and keep current.	
Establish a Formal Mentoring Program	Establishing a formal mentoring program with defined parameters and standards can provide an opportunity to maintain a high level of rule understanding and application in the field. Establish a protocol for selecting mentors for the program.	
Provide Leadership Training to Managers	<p>In the rail industry, managers are often promoted from within. While they have the technical skills to perform their jobs, but may lack formal leadership skill training. Leadership training should a focus on communication, mentoring and coaching.</p> <p>SLSI has a Leadership Development Training course available, offered to railroads free of charge.</p>	<p>SLSI's Leadership Development Training Course Information:</p> <p>SLSI Leadership Development Training</p>
Conduct Customized Hazmat Training	<p>Active planning and participation in emergency response exercises involving railroad managers and employees and local emergency responders can improve regulation knowledge and operations preparedness. Railroads should conduct hazmat training emphasizing the commodities they handle.</p> <p>In an emergency, employees will react in ways consistent with their level of training. SLSI offers free hazmat training and exercises to railroads.</p>	<p>SLSI's Hazardous Materials Training Program Information:</p> <p>SLSI Hazardous Materials Training</p>
Hold an Annual Review of Training Programs and Practices for Consistency, Timeliness and Regulatory Compliance	<p>Each railroad's SAP should have a mechanism prompting an annual review, with the participation of persons from different levels within the organization.</p> <p>Leadership, managers and employees would review all the current training programs and practices and make recommendations as to how to improve program content and execution.</p>	