

Safety excellence requires high level of commitment from companies

Business leaders have a lot on their minds. When they are not fine-tuning their business strategies or looking for new ways to optimise operations, they are interrogating local and international market trends, sourcing new talent and exploring potential innovations.

These demands don't leave much time for the consideration of workplace safety and its long-term benefits for the organisation. In fact, workplace safety is an area that is commonly delegated to occupational health and safety officers, many who do not regard themselves as safety professionals. These people are often placed in their roles because of their passion for safety rather than their safety-related education or advanced technical know-how or ability.

Innovation PPE Solutions, Business Unit Manager, Anton Zwanepoel, says as an organisation's most important resource, the safety and wellbeing of its people should be a priority. "Having to spend money on safety is often regarded as a grudge purchase. This is unfortunate because money well spent on safety can mean the difference between a motivated and happy workforce or an unproductive workforce."

South Africa's Occupational Health and Safety Act requires that employers do everything "reasonably practicable" to protect people from harm. Transitioning to a company that delivers excellent safety performance as opposed to simply conforming with legislation requires senior management commitment, employee motivation, an effective safety management structure, accountability for safety performance, employee training and unconditional regulatory compliance.

A risk assessment to determine what work activities can cause harm to people or damage to property is a good starting point. "This means identifying hazards, their seriousness and what could go wrong, and then coming up with systems of work to reduce the associated risks of each process," says Zwanepoel.

Employers are sometimes quick to blame employees for non-compliance with safety regulations. There is often a sense of "we train our people in safety compliance, we provide them with the correct safety gear and we conduct regular checks, but still they choose to ignore certain instructions."

"The problem is leaders often talk about safety, but then don't walk their talk. This is very telling. Essentially, their actions are louder than their words and they are indicating that they don't consider safety as a value-adding component of the business," adds Zwanepoel.

He cautions that companies can never become complacent about safety in the workplace. "Constant change in the workplace – new technology, processes and people – mean the risk profile of the company is in constant flux. This means safety management strategies need to be revisited on a regular basis.

"At Innovative PPE Solutions we urge companies to invest in premium quality Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Just doing the bare minimum is not acceptable when people's lives are at stake. Not only does poor quality PPE increase the risk of injury

or death, but the entire organisation's reputation could be at risk if something goes wrong.

“Our top-of-the-range PPE products are specifically designed to protect people and workplaces from all known hazards and we cater to a wide range of industries, from construction and hospitality, to mining, engineering and farming,” says Zwanepoel.

Ultimately, properly managed safety programmes show commitment to safety by management and create a safety culture where everyone wants to be safe. Programmes that incorporate worker insights make them feel like they are part of the safety solution.

When workers feel safer, they feel happier and absenteeism drops. Less accidents mean less reputational damage and cost to the business. Most importantly, the company is protecting its most valuable asset: its people.