
Complacency and the workplace

The term complacency, doing the same task for so long without incident that you assume nothing will ever happen, can become a challenge in any workplace. Complacency can affect anyone at any age regardless of their experience but there are ways to spot complacency among yourself and your employees. All too often employees do not realize how complacent they actually have become until they have a near miss or close call; such events tend to jumpstart hearts and refocus proper attention, at least for a little while, to the importance of tasks at hand.

Many times, employees are unaware of complacency and as they work through their daily job functions, they lose sight of hazards that may exist. Some may feel they are not affected by complacency but just letting your guard down for short time can be dangerous. One way to combat complacency is to be an engaged worker. Engaged workers are those that always work in the moment staying aware of the surroundings.

Let's take an example of a person who performs a daily safety inspection before operation. This daily routine occurs for months even years without incident. Then the employee decides to skip the inspection. Then another time and soon inspections are being done less frequently and then something happens. Perhaps the employee doing the inspection gets injured or one of their fellow workers. Either way the results can be terrifying.

Usually the best person to spot complacency is the employee themselves, but complacency can mean they don't see the dangers right in front of them. To stay safe, teach employees how to identify complacency for themselves. This may include situations such as:

- Dissatisfaction with work and/or lack of motivation
- Missing steps in work processes
- Frequent near-misses or incidents

Since it can be difficult to recognize these signs for each employee, teach them to spot them in their co-workers. The more they learn how to recognize these signs, the easier it may be to identify them in other situations. When looking at signs of complacency from your employees keep an eye out for the following situations:

- Changes in attitude
- Noticeable increase or decrease in communication
- Tardiness for meetings or shifts

As we mentioned earlier, getting employees engaged is a key point in getting out of the rut of complacency. There are some steps to focus on that will help.

- By consciously focusing on the task will lead to setting them up for success.
- It is key to recognize and dismiss distractions when they come up.
- When approaching tasks look for improvements in the routine. Always be on the lookout for continual improvement.
- If possible, consider changing some elements of the work schedule for the day; the change could help them focus and keep them from falling into "cruise control" mode.

Identifying and addressing complacency is a team effort. Not only is it key for employees but the employer can assist by looking at opportunities to change things up. Some suggestions to consider for employers can include:

- **Sharing the Mission**— Remind employees of the company’s purpose and goals so they maintain a connection to the larger missions and emphasize that their behaviors have an impact.
- **Avoid Routines**—Repetition can be related to complacency, if possible, change up some of the tasks required to add variety to an employee’s job.
- **Encourage Observation** - Have employees briefly stop work and observe the actions of other as they work, observing others raises one’s own awareness as well as the awareness of their co-workers
- **Correct Poor Performance**— Mentoring programs and coaching help employees identify and change troubled practices and potential problems.
- **Safety Talks** – Make safety talks part of a daily routine and get employees involved.
- **Share Knowledge** – Have employees identify and share the steps they perform to complete a job. Having another set of eyes may help improve the process.

Complacency can be a dangerous thing, and everyone is susceptible. It can lead to underperformance, low client satisfaction, workplace accidents and low morale. But with team effort and employee engagement, complacency doesn’t have to run the workplace.

For more information, please contact Andy Sawan at 330.819.4728 or andrew.sawan@sedgwick.com