

LEADERSHIP LEARNING GUIDE / EPISODE 5

33 Stitches in an Office Cubicle - A Leadership Lesson I Never Forgot

Topic: Safety leadership, hazard recognition and ownership Audience: Leadership, management, safety, operations and organizational behavior courses

ABOUT THE EPISODE

Pete recalls responding as a First Responder to an office employee who suffered a severe leg laceration requiring 33 stitches - not on a factory floor, but in an ordinary cubicle. The accident showed how familiar conditions can become invisible until someone gets hurt. The episode broadens that lesson into safety leadership: use fresh eyes to find hazards, involve people from different areas, and teach employees to recognize and act on risks themselves. The goal is not simply compliance. It is a culture in which everyone takes ownership of sending people home safely.

Safety doesn't belong to the safety department. It belongs to everyone.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After watching, students should be able to:

- Explain why familiar work environments can contain serious hazards that people stop noticing.
- Describe how fresh eyes and cross-functional observation can improve hazard recognition.
- Distinguish safety compliance from a culture of shared safety ownership.
- Identify leadership behaviors that teach employees to recognize, report and reduce risks.

FOUR PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES

1. Familiar does not mean safe. Repeated exposure can make a hazardous condition feel normal.
2. Find the hazard before the hazard finds someone. Do not wait for an injury to reveal a risk.
3. Use fresh eyes. People outside an area may notice hazards regular occupants no longer see.
4. Teach ownership. A great leader develops people who can recognize hazards and act even when the leader is not there.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why can an ordinary office environment still produce a serious workplace injury?
2. What causes people to stop noticing a condition they see every day?
3. How can a leader encourage hazard reporting without making employees feel blamed or inspected?
4. Why can someone from another department sometimes see hazards that experienced employees miss?
5. What behaviors would show that safety ownership has spread beyond the safety department?

FIVE-MINUTE CLASSROOM ACTIVITY / FRESH EYES SAFETY SCAN

Choose a familiar classroom, office, shop or work area. Individually list three conditions that could cause an injury, even if no accident has occurred. Compare your list with a partner and identify one hazard the other person noticed that you did not. Select one item and propose a practical countermeasure, then explain how a leader could involve the people who use the area in making the change.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Strong safety leadership means helping people see hazards before someone is injured, giving them permission to act, and developing employees who take ownership of safety themselves.

FIND THE HAZARD BEFORE THE HAZARD FINDS SOMEONE.

WATCH EPISODE 5
https://youtu.be/2oP6XnRy1_M

Scan the code to watch on YouTube.



Explore the principles behind this case in
The Lean Leader's Playbook.
Explore how leaders help employees recognize hazards and take ownership of safety.

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