

CREATING A GENUINE SAFETY CULTURE

How to change the contracting space

BY BRENT OBERLINK

In the contracting world, we see all too often companies that simply just check boxes on safety, quality and paperwork in general. We often see these same contractors underbid jobs and then fail to execute the project safely or with quality. It's aggravating to see these contractors underbid (which hurts the industry) and then underperform on safety and quality.

It's not uncommon for contractors and customers to mishandle safety issues.

I've seen customers fire a good contractor because of a minor incident. Even when the contractor had a great safety culture and fixed the issue for the long term. The customer needed to check the box that it was dealt with.



I've seen contractors have a minor incident and get fired because they didn't actively mitigate the hazard going forward and blew it off.

Both are wrong. Why? Because neither one of them actively sought to mitigate and remove the hazard. They didn't do a thorough investigation, bring in experts and look at every possible way to mitigate the hazard.

What's the best way to cultivate a genuine safety culture?

1. Encourage BBS, near miss and incident reporting — use this data to trend and mitigate hazards, proactively eliminating them as much as possible.
2. Audit and inspect crew and job sites. Score and evaluate them.
3. Preach and practice safety, from the top down.
4. Make safety one of your core values — hire, fire and evaluate by it.
5. Do not punish for turning in safety. Don't overburden them with paperwork. If it becomes a headache or immediate punishment, communication is shut down.
6. Create a safety committee of employees that looks at near misses and incidents from the industry and pushes to proactively mitigate these hazards. This encourages involvement from the crews in the field and lets them know it's a serious effort.

Create a culture where crews are comfortable to turn in near misses, BBS and all safety incidents no matter how small. This is where you can proactively learn and look for ways to remove hazards.

Use an employee or contractor to lead the team in coming to solutions for hazards together. The moment that you severely punish or overburden with paperwork, communication slows and you lose this important key step in hazard mitigation. I've seen companies fire employees or contractors for this and thus, shut down all open communication with their other employees and contractors. This isn't a safety culture: it's simply checking boxes. A true safety culture that is successful relies on buy-in, transparency and constantly evaluating all hazards so they don't happen again. For every task, we should ask "what if?" and then work as a team to remove that hazard. Throw a safety card to start a discussion.

Safety has to be reactive, but it must also be proactive.

Collecting data, learning and asking the right questions together will help remove and reduce the risks.

Lead from the top. Push for everyone to be fully on board with safety. And practice what you preach.

At Lanracorp, we have tremendous safety involvement from our field team by doing the things listed above. Our team is transparent, and we proactively look for every hazard and for ways to mitigate them together as a team.

What can you do to choose the best contractors? Ask these questions.

1. Do they have a culture of safety and quality? Or just a book about it?
2. Do they provide transparency? Photos and documentation of work? Do they have processes?
3. Is their employee turnover low? What's their customer turnover?
4. Are they picky? Are their trucks nice, employees well dressed and presentable? Is their website legit and do they show pictures of previous work?
5. Will they provide you several references of large projects?
6. Do they have a legit contract or bidding process?
7. Do they provide full insurance up front?

How can you change the contracting space?

You can create change by implementing a culture based upon safety, doing what is right, customer satisfaction and above all, continuous improvement. It takes a while to build that culture, people will come and go, but it will be worth it. Base your pricing model on the total value (safety, quality and doing the job right) instead of focusing on being cheap. Cheap is rarely the best in the service industry. Build your companies safety culture/programs to be the best, upgrade your equipment, hire/train the best employees in the business and seek ways to over-deliver on every front — and then price your service based on that. ✪



Brent Oberlink is currently the President of Lanracorp, Inc. With 15 years of experience under his belt, Brent seeks to transform the contracting industry. Brent has been in the contracting industry for years, and it always irritated him that only a few companies seemed to really take pride in simply doing their "craft" the best way possible. That's why he started a company that has a culture of excellence: in safety, quality and in customer experience. His goal is to help transform the contracting industry by helping all to push for a higher standard.