

A Safety Incentive Program that Works

Lisa Godlewski

REWARDING EMPLOYEES WITH INCENTIVES for a job done safely is not new to the construction industry. Employers have long struggled with how to get workers to care about their safety and the safety of others.

While many different incentive programs exist, one General Building Contractors Association (GBCA) member believes its program has been proven to help build the "culture of safety" that employers strive toward.

A CULTURE OF SAFETY

Employers work hard to make sure safety is a top priority for all employees. From slogans, to Toolbox Talks, to safety training, it is about keeping the workforce informed and safe. Not just because it is the "right thing to do," but because safety records impact quality of life and the bottom line.

In fact, Sean Healy, Vice President of the concrete company Healy Long & Jevin says some of his past and best superintendents were able to "stand a building up a lot

faster than estimated and they seemed very profitable on the front end. However, in actuality the jobs turned out to be some of the least profitable for the company due to injuries and claims that were sometimes not settled for years after the job was complete."

One of the greatest challenges employers have is to create a real company safety culture and buy-in that all employees are not only responsible for themselves, but also responsible for those around them. "A properly constructed and run incentive program can help create and sustain that culture," says Healy.

POSSIBLE PITFALLS

Skeptics of incentive programs ask, why give an incentive for something employees should be doing anyway? Isn't it the employee's job to work in a safe and timely manner? "Not so," says Bill Cobb, President of Haverstick-Borthwick and Chairman of the GBCE Safety Committee. "Employees may be concerned for their

own safety but a culture of safety that makes them care about everybody around them requires reinforcement."

Another traditional argument against safety incentive programs is the punitive side. If there is an accident, employees are left wondering who "messed up our safety program?" The injured employee becomes the bad guy," says Cobb "because he is taking away their reward." Furthermore, a safety department could try to downplay an incident in an effort to avoid losing incentives or filing a claim.

Finally, many traditional programs often rely heavily on a reward such as a raffle or a drawing that takes place after a determined period of time. The main issue is that one person gets rewarded, not the total company.

A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

Sean Healy struggled with these issues. "The big question I always tried to answer was how do we as a company incentivize all employees to do a safe job, and more importantly have each employee look after one other?"

That question was answered for Healy following a casual dinner with Jim Shanahan, a friend and principle of a new credit / debit card business called Maverick Network Solutions. "We discussed a company safety incentive program utilizing a debit card where safety performance would be rewarded over the entire company." From the CEO to a delivery driver, each employee has a card.

Two and a half years into the program, Healy is thrilled with the results. "Our employees were skeptical at first but ultimately they bought into the program and we created the culture we set out to build."

PROGRAM DETAILS

The program accrues \$.20 cents per man hour worked over an entire month and places the money in a separate safety

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account. At the end of the month if there are no OSHA recordable accidents, jobsite violations, at-fault traffic accidents and a few other obtainable goals are met, the accrued amount is distributed equally among all of the employee's cards.

New employees have a 60-day probationary time period before they are eligible, however their safety performance counts towards the total company incentive immediately. "We have found that our employees evaluate new hires quickly and make sure they adopt our program. If an employee is laid off, the card is still active but only carries the balance rewarded when he was working. We will place them back on the incentive program when they return to work," says Healy.

The cards are re-loadable prepaid debit MasterCard® cards and are accepted anywhere MasterCard is accepted. They are unique to Healy Long & Jevin and feature the company's logo across the top of the card.

Technology has really allowed this program to work. Healy Long & Jevin can activate cards and add money electronically. Additionally, employees can login to check their balance and manage their account. The cards have proven to be more flexible for the company than just for safety. They can add per-diem money to an individual's account if an employee is traveling on company business or even add bonuses.

IN CASE OF AN ACCIDENT

Healy, Long & Jevin insists that any safety incentive program continues to be supportive during an accident. It is never "we

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have 1,000 hours here, don't break the streak." Instead we say, "despite our best efforts, we had an accident, we're handling it and we're using this as an opportunity to learn. We know accidents are going to happen," says Joe Abbonizio, Risk Management/Safety Manager, Healy Long & Jevin.

Healy, Long & Jevin sends out a payroll insert informing the employees if the company reached the incentive and how much each employee will receive on their card. The company also highlights safety accomplishments and performances. If the company did not make the incentive, the insert explains what happened, less the specifics of who and where. The company then performs additional train-



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ing to all employees at all job sites including the office.

TOTAL COMPANY BUY-IN

"Attention to safety has definitely increased," says Healy. "I personally watched one of our delivery drivers jump out of his truck and inform another employee on proper ladder safety! Benefits for the com-

pany have included improved productivity, better morale and more importantly fewer injuries which has translated to less workers' compensation claims and reduced insurance premiums.■

Sean Healy of Healy, Long & Jevin and Bill Cobb of Haverstick Borthwick contributed to this article.



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