

Premier Oil: A client's perspective

Objectives

Premier Oil is a UK-listed upstream oil and gas company with interests in eight countries around the world. Under a new, ambitious management team, the company identified *safety performance* as a key element of a new, continual business improvement strategy.

Under *safety performance* three key changes were needed: creating an

- **Safety is about people:** enabling people to make a personal connection with safety so that safety becomes every *individual's* responsibility;
- **Improving safety leadership:** highlighting the importance of good safety leadership, and teach participants the skills required for successful interventions;
- **Cultural shift:** to create a cultural shift, where participants take what they have learnt in the program into the workplace.

"In the face of many competing priorities we recognised that what we needed was to recalibrate and reaffirm the relationship between safety and productivity."

(Jan Rusin, Health Environment Safety & Security Manager at Premier Oil).

Premier Oil needed a safety leadership program that would support this change. It was decided that this program should provide a new approach, as Jan Rusin explains:

"For a lot of people health & safety is a dry subject involving charts, graphs and tables which people look at and respond with: "oh yes of course we must do that but we're also under pressure to do all these other things." We were looking for something different. We wanted a program that would generate significant impact, shake off any underlying apathy and fundamentally change the way participants think about safety."

A New Approach: combining experiential & knowledge based learning

Premier Oil commissioned safety leadership specialists, SETT for Safety, and learning and development consultancy Forum Interactive, to develop a two day safety leadership program that combined *experiential* with *knowledge* based learning. To ensure a cross-organisational culture shift, the program was delivered to all levels from technicians to senior managers.

The experiential sessions were designed to engage participants and help them see safety from an entirely different perspective. This included interactive sessions which demonstrated 'good' and 'bad' safety leadership, and provided the opportunity to test safety leadership skills.

The knowledge based modules gave an overview of the theory and reasoning behind safety leadership, using impactful, real life case studies to bring the theory to life.

Together, these sessions examined key questions:

- Why is good leadership necessary?
- What does a good safety culture look like?
- What does safety leadership mean?
- What do good safety leaders do?
- How do you tackle a blame culture?

Delivering the objectives

1. Safety is about people

The centre piece of the program is an impactful, emotionally charged play called 'Andy's story' which tells the story of a fatal accident offshore.

'Andy's Story' is based on a fictional event, but one that is very familiar. This helped participants to relate to the characters and the events that unfold.

The main aim of the play is to encourage participants to make personal connections to safety by demonstrating the 'human' consequences of unsafe acts on the victim, his colleagues, friends and family. The process is raw and sometimes shocking, but is highly effective at getting people's attention.

Jan Rusin comments:

"Most people initially felt uncomfortable with the approach - before it all starts people are thinking "here we go, more safety leadership." But every one of those people on the program has said that the experience was powerful and a strong motivator. It generated an emotional connection with safety by reminding them of the consequences of getting safety wrong. In this way the session has hit home the point that safety should be a fundamental part of everyone's job."

2. Improving safety leadership

Andy's story includes an interactive session where the facilitators/participants go back in time to look at the series of events that led up to the accident.

Participants are encouraged to intervene, make suggestions, discuss key points and test different strategies to effect positive change. The scene is paused, re-wound then played through again, allowing the participants to see different outcomes.

This provides a safe, 'blame free' environment where participants can express their views and test their intervention strategies without risk or fear of criticism. They get to see first-hand what good and bad safety leadership looks like, and develop the skills required for successful interventions in the workplace.

Jan explains:

“The intervention session encouraged people to reconnect with the human consequences of poor HSE leadership. Using actors is new for everyone but they really bring the issue home. People forget they’re actors, which results in some pretty blunt exchanges in the interactive sessions.

The actors also helped to show how safety leadership is a sequence of events going right to the top. So one person’s poor behaviour is often a reflection of how those above him are behaving. They also get the opportunity to put some skills together to turn that situation round. This boosts confidence and helps our leaders recognise when to intervene and how to do it.”

3. Cultural shift

By engaging participants, personalising safety and highlighting the importance of intervention, the safety programme has already generated a cultural shift at Premier Oil.

Jan concludes:

“We are already witnessing positive change. These range from comments and feedback from participants, to direct action being taken in the workplace – for example, one of the technical specialists who attended the program commented on how he had been quite ‘smug’ about his safety performance in the past, but now realised more needed to be done to ensure it continues.”

Another participant showed me the minutes of a team meeting between key employees and contractors who were undertaking subsea engineering work. In the minutes, item number one was ‘safety moments’. He used one of the exercises from the safety program to demonstrate how important getting good safety design is to Premier Oil. He used what he’d learnt to get everyone to stop and think, and to demonstrate Premier’s values. This is exactly the kind of cultural shift we are seeking.”

-ENDS-

Contact details:

Tess Allen

E-mail: tess@foruminteractive.co.uk

Telephone: +44(0) 7920 207732

www.foruminteractive.co.uk