

## Behavioural Based Safety - Information Sheet (2)

### Ten tips: What to avoid and what to emphasise in your BBS approach

If you are reading this, you are most likely interested in effecting behavioural change. You probably want to do this in a workplace setting. The goal is most likely to increase safety levels, in an organisation or number of organisations. You already know the HSA provides on-line information on work-related safety issues. That's why you are on the HSA website; all of these are easy assumptions to make.

We make assumptions regularly about why people do what they do. In order to ensure our assumptions are right more of the time, we need to study what people do, when and where and how they do it, in order to inform why they do it that way, then. That's Behaviour Based Safety's underpinning theme. Sometimes the links are evident easily – you are on this site seeking health and safety at work information, not a cooking demonstration, for instance!

They are not always clear-cut though. Sometimes, the causes of behaviour are complex, difficult to unravel and fuzzy. As I get hundreds of queries about the method of delivery, or the 'training' of BBS, I have put this information sheet together to help you make informed, wiser decisions prior to starting the BBS journey. We have a more fulsome BBS guide, with more in-depth information, on the website too. [LINK](#). We also have another Information Sheet 'Ten Tips', which runs parallel to and complimentary to this one [LINK](#).

- BBS processes really are not 'trained'. They are not amenable to being trained in the way other 'skillsets' are, because applying behavioural science involves a fluid set of skills that need to be adapted regularly. Be wary of jumping straight in to a training arena for BBS as it's unlikely to be the right approach. There is certainly a training element to it, but it's not that simple.
- Engagement of employees has to be voluntary. This is often very difficult to take on board. This doesn't mean that they have to have the 'right' attitude, (you cannot change an attitude quickly so that's not part of the process of ABA, the underpinning of BBS) but they have to be willing to engage with the process of behaviour, behaviour observation and feedback, without opt outs. Employees should get a full picture of the benefits of engaging in such a programme before being asked to participate.
- The process is a phased one. The Observation phase is the visible operational phase (only to be begun after much planning, organising, consulting and learning). There are a number of leadership behaviours that need to be established to support the observation phase and indeed the BBS process itself.
- Be open about the observation phase and content. Everybody knows what goes on in teams and sub teams in organisations, so why pretend and cover up? Be clear about the goals too – to reduce unsafe acts to protect employee's wellbeing; be clear about the nature of the timing of the observations required. A strong BBS process is designed by frontline staff as these are the people who should benefit from the process. Ensure that you have at minimum a representative sample of such staff involved in the design of target behaviours to observe.
- Who observes? This is a crucial question not always considered in BBS process. Why? Because often management mandates the behaviours, says what has to be done, to what degree and by when. If behaviours are veering away from this method, then punishment systems might be a result. This is not part of the BBS approach and so can confound it. So, often employees are asked to observe each other and record data in order to remove the

potential for blame and punishment which management doing it might bring about. The employees also create and decide which are the most important target behaviours to observe. When employees create the programme they are far more likely to conduct honest, constructive observations. In addition, BBS systems will treat safety breaches as a separate event to an observation; if a breach occurs during an observation, the observer might stop the observation, approach the person, tell him/her of the breach just observed and ask that this behaviour stop, and leave the observation for another time. This can be written into the process, so that everybody knows and accepts that whilst breaches will not be 'let go' or ignored, they will be dealt with on the spot and separately to the behavioural observation process.

- Linking observations to improvement means tailoring and focusing the observations. If the brief is too wide, nothing valid or reliable will be found. A focused observation pattern and patterns are required; the design of this might take longer but will ultimately prove more insightful.
- Do not fall foul of the reliance on outside consultants or experts. While they are perhaps needed in places, this is internally driven or won't last. A team of ideally 5 – 9 people might be immersed in the project and let the outside expert(s) lead them in terms of showing them and explaining to them how best to embed such methods into the way things are done.
- Remember the goal – to reduce accidents and near misses and improve safety behaviour, so ensure that you are analysing the data that you are so diligently collecting. Feeding back this progress data to frontline staff can function as a further motivation for safe behaviour. If work groups can see how they are progressing on a week-by-week or month-by-month basis they can see their successes and easily see what they can work on. The importance of regular feedback cannot be over stated.
- Very few employees intend to behave in ways which are counterproductive, which result in a higher likelihood of accident. We all do things for reasons, and the reasons are often reasonable, despite running counter to best practice. The aim of BBS is to uncover these hidden reasons, examine them afresh and shake them up, so that aspects of the behaviour can be tweaked.
- Listen to what people are saying, on and off the actual 'job' of the 'job' of BBS.

Key words for further searches: Applied Behaviour Analysis for organisational development; reinforcement contingencies; behaviour analysis; using psychological science for managing safety.

Part Two of the HSA's *Ten Tips* series for Psychosocial Risk Assessment and Reduction

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