

What is Safety Culture?

Safety Culture Interview with Martin Woodall



What are the different stages of a Safety Culture?

“There are three stages in the development of a Health and Safety culture. The first stage is what we call the dependent culture: in a dependent culture its very much management driven with little employee involvement. It’s about management commitment, it’s about rules, it’s about discipline but the practical problem is you don’t get much employee involvement; it’s driven by the management, owned by the management. A classic trait of this actually is; in places where I’ve worked you find Monday to Friday, nine to five, we find one way of working - evenings, nightshift, weekends - it can be like a different place. Because it’s driven by having the management present to have safe behaviour.

“As we improve the culture we move away from just management commitment, to management commitment and personal commitment - more employee involvement. In an Independent culture people behave safely whether managers are there or not. People behave safely because they value their own safety; they want to look after themselves, they want to behave safely. People don’t rely on management and there’s much more

What is a Safety Culture?

“People often ask what do we mean by a safety culture? Culture, a general definition; It’s the way we do things around here. A more formal definition but a very important one is; Culture is our collected values, beliefs, attitude and behaviour. It’s about what we believe, what we value. It’s about our attitude to Health and Safety. Ultimately it’s about the way we behave, the way we look after ourselves and each other.”

employee involvement and clearly that’s a much better position to be in and injury rates are typically lower in that situation.

“The big prize though is the Interdependent culture. In an Interdependent culture we don’t just look after ourselves, we look after each other; so we’ve moved through management commitment, through personal commitment to team commitment. It’s about team commitment; it’s about involvement.

“At the end of the day we’re all human - we all get tired, we all get stressed; potentially we can all make mistakes. In an Interdependent culture we look after each other not just ourselves and that’s the big prize when injury rates are at their lowest.

Why the Meerkats?

“Scientists are fascinated by the meerkat culture; the unconditional cooperation of meerkats. How they work together in an Interdependent culture to their mutual benefit. This is something we should aspire to in the workplace; an Interdependent culture where we all look after each other.”

[All for One the Meerkat Way DVD online preview](#)



A full time safety professional since 1985, initially as a Safety Adviser in an R&D function, then promoted to Health & Safety Manager in ICI Chemicals & Polymers. Martin left in 1997 to join a Safety Consultancy where he worked for 7 years before leaving and starting his own business. A Consultancy specialising in Behavioural Safety, and all things in the arena of behavioural safety - behaviour, culture, attitude, perception, leadership, team-safety, behavioural auditing.

[More about Martin Woodall](#)