



INCLUSION AS A KEY COMPONENT TO SAFETY CULTURE

Racism Toolbox Talk Series – Part 3

Date: _____ Jobsite: _____ Discussion Leader: _____

INCLUSION IS A CRITICAL COMPONENT OF SAFETY CULTURE

What was once considered simply a compliance burden, over the past few decades construction has embraced safety as a critical component of workplace culture. When companies are building a safety culture, more often than not, they focus solely on the physical aspect and inclusion is not considered. However, the mental and emotional wellbeing of employees – based on whether they feel included as a valued member of the team – can be linked to safety incidences on a job site.

It is common practice for construction workers to observe and assess any new employee – regardless of race or ethnicity – to determine skill level and ensure safe work practices. These assessments only become an issue when they shift from skill and safety checks and into workplace harassment, hazing or bullying. Companies that have established inclusive cultures will help ensure that employees understand the difference between the two.

Ongoing acts of racism take a mental and emotional toll on the wellbeing of the individuals who are the targets of racist attacks. Even if you are not the direct target of these racist acts, they are likely still impacting your ability to safely perform your job and equally impact the safety performance of everyone around you. Studies show that 71 percent of all employees report being impacted – either directly or indirectly – by some type of exclusionary behavior an average of four times per year.

Consider the following scenario:

There are ten employees working on a job site. Nine of the workers are White. One is Black. One of the White employees tells racist jokes or makes racist comments whenever their Black colleague is within earshot. It has been happening at least once, if not multiple times per day, for the past few weeks.

This White individual is distracted throughout the day, constantly looking around to see if their Black colleague is in the vicinity instead of focusing on the task at hand. The Black individual attempts to limit interaction with this White colleague by taking on solo tasks, which end up isolating the Black employee from the rest of the group. When required to work with this White colleague, the Black employee looks visibly upset. These racist comments and jokes make the other eight White employees on the job site uncomfortable, but nobody has ever said a word about it.

It is everyone's responsibility on a job site – including yours – to speak up and/or do something when witnessing acts of racism and ensure a safe working environment for all. If one person's safety is affected by acts of racism, it impacts the safety of everybody else on the job site. The fourth and final toolbox talk in this series will provide tips on how you can be an active bystander against racism.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

For this scenario consider the following questions:

1. How might the Black employee's safety performance be impacted by these acts of racism?
2. How might the safety performance of the White employee who is making the racist comments be impacted by these acts of racism?
3. How might the safety performance of the other White employees who are witnessing these acts of racism be impacted by these acts?