**The secret of safety**

What is the common thread running through almost every safety activity? We could be talking about PPE usage, rules and protocols compliance, training, meetings, toolbox talks, performance measurement, behavior observation and feedback, safety suggestions and problem-solving, auditing and reporting, investigations and root cause analyses -- you name it.

Football coaches have long said, “Nothing happens on the field until somebody blocks somebody.” Well, in safety, nothing happens until your employees are engaged. Engagement is the common thread that weaves together just about every facet of your safety program. Nothing happens in safety if employees are not engaged. That’s the secret.

Engagement is organic to safety programs. It grows from within the program. You can’t mandate engagement. OSHA cannot enforce engagement. It can’t be forced. It either exists or it doesn’t.

Safety professionals, through their attitudes, actions and empathy, nurture engagement and help it grow. Pros listen, ask questions, show they care, show respect for the opinions – and complaints – of employees. This is how engagement ripens and blossoms. Pros also need to recognize and reward engagement in order to cultivate and sustain it. Without positive feedback, confirmation, validation, and encouragement, engagement withers on the vine.

Pros can take any number of steps, large and small --addressing individuals, teams, work cells, units, shifts or entire departments and organizations -- to show how the organization appreciates and respects engagement. It’s a matter of being creative, perceptive, and in tune with your workforce. By being connected to your workers, you know what turns them on, what motivates them, what challenges them, and what turns them off.

Engagement is the secret weapon of safety. And it’s a double-edged weapon: on one side *you’re* engaged with your workforce as a coach, counselor, facilitator, instructor and enforcer if need be; on the other side, *your workforce* is actively and continually engaged in your vision, goals, best practices and an assortment of safety culture-related activities. Be sure to recognize and reward your employees’ active and sustained engagement.