

Floor-Tested Practices Deliver Real Results in Stamping Safety

Attaining plant-safety goals and ensuring worker safety are, for most manufacturers, ongoing challenges; managing safety wisely and consistently can be a struggle. Safety is an even more complicated challenge for companies experiencing significant growth. Talan Products has not only achieved a strong (remarkable) safety record, it has maintained and strengthened safety in the midst of a 35%-per-year growth curve—and a three-year doubling in size.

Because of Talan’s history of managing safety effectively even through dynamic and fast-paced change—and shattering the convention that high growth imperils safety—we’re often asked how we do it.

It really boils down to whether your organization puts the effort in and makes safety *the* top priority. At Talan Products we’ve found safety success through a number of ideas and practices, and our belief that culture is the foundation.

Creating a Safety Culture

To attain safety success in stamping facilities, your first step is establishing an organization-wide “safety culture.” In fact, your entire safety program depends on—and grows out of—the culture.

What do we mean by “safety culture”? At Talan, safety is the first of our four Core Values. Safety *informs or influences* literally every decision we make. It’s how we look at *everything*. Once you create a true safety culture, safety isn’t an afterthought—it’s *always* the number-one consideration and core to your mission.

This is true not just for team leaders and supervisors, but for all employees. Everyone is expected understand and prioritize safety in the same way (it starts at orientation). At Talan, we’re all on the same page. That’s the culture.

But, the culture doesn’t just “happen.” It takes leadership, which starts at the top. The culture is an attitude and mindset—a source of pride—instilled and nurtured by the company’s executive team. When those leading your company take safety seriously, they provide the resources needed to ensure a safe workplace, and intentionally set a good example. Seeing this, personnel trust and follow the example.

Owners and managers must demonstrate the commitment to safety—and adherence to protocols—through their actions. When they walk the plant floor, they wear safety gear (PPE) and meticulously follow all safety practices to set the tone and show floor personnel that safety rules matter—and that *everyone* knows and follows them. Following the example, employees in turn reinforce safety

practices and set their own good example in every task. Safety becomes the norm, and then the corporate-wide “culture.”

Without the “culture” (and consistent leadership) in place, employees lose focus—and that’s when unsafe practices inevitably creep back in.

The “culture” is the glue that holds safety policies, rules, practices, and procedures together, and renders everyone accountable to each other. When everyone practices safety, they’re all aware of standards and expectations—and a strong but friendly accountability follows. Safety is always *the* big priority, no matter what else is going on. No one has any fear of backlash when speaking up about safety issues or problems (to each other, to supervisors, and to the record), and co-workers always watch each other. In fact, employees are encouraged to report “near misses,” which are treated as though an injury *had* taken place, documented, and remedied immediately.

It’s an open and cooperative culture based on accountability. The safety culture is “omnipresent” in all aspects of company operation, in all departments.

Sustaining the Culture — Ongoing Safety Education

Once established, your organization’s safety culture needs nurturing. This requires ongoing safety education on a number of levels.

Weekly Meetings — Short, mandatory *weekly* safety meetings with all floor personnel keep safety front of mind. Each week a different topic is addressed with the entire team for just 15 minutes. By meeting *regularly* your teams keep the safety buzz active and relevant to their experience. Management and team leaders select relevant, timely safety topics for discussion. These sessions educate workers, keep them current, and improve camaraderie, ongoing safety dialog, and performance. They also keep everyone on the same page.

Education is ongoing, dynamic, fluid and responsive. Safety meetings are sometimes needed spontaneously—right on the spot, especially for events requiring everyone’s attention. Safety events are often teaching opportunities, and should be used as such. Empowering team members to stop everything and focus on the safety issue—in the moment—is essential to ensuring that such teachable moments are not lost.

Near-Miss Reporting — “Near-miss” reporting and analysis is an essential safety-education element. Feedback from these events drives safety awareness. Culturally, Talan treats every near-miss event on the stamping floor as seriously as a real accident, because all are genuine, highly instructive learning and reinforcing opportunities—real teachable moments with sticking power.

When near misses occur, seize the opportunity to learn as much as possible about why it happened. At Talan we use the 5-Why analysis / problem-solving tool to discern the root cause of every near

miss (by asking the question “why” five times, we clearly see the problem and its solution). It’s important to have everyone involved in or affected by the incident participate in the 5-Why process to help come up with the corrective action—because this requires them all to understand/recognize what happened and why it’s a problem, and distinguish causes from symptoms.

Also, don’t try to rush through the review process just to “get it done”—carefully and thoroughly analyze incidents at the right pace. By conducting a complete inquiry and allowing personnel to help identify corrective actions (change necessary to prevent the problem) the lesson resonates—it’s seared into collective memory, reducing risk of recurrence and strengthening the safety culture.

The 5-Why collective-analysis process leads to effective responses and corrective action.

Tracking Safety Metrics — By meticulously tracking safety metrics as a daily routine and regularly publishing safety results (especially internally)—and comparing internal metrics to industry metrics—everyone knows where the company stands on team safety performance. Teams that *know* their safety record gain competitive pride—and motivation to improve and stay on top.

Also, teams well-educated on and open about the safety-record/metric process understand what is—or is not—a “recordable” safety event. This enhances recordkeeping integrity and accuracy and ensures the metrics work best for everyone by clearly depicting safety risks and performance.

Seeking Safety Knowledge — Creating and keeping a great safety record is fueled by actively and continuously *seeking* the best knowledge in the industry on safety—and then effectively disseminating it to your teams. This keeps the company’s safety culture tuned-in, informed, engaged, challenged, and top-of-game.

Company leaders who want safety excellence should regularly attend industry seminars and safety programs—and stay current with industry trade publications—with the aim of learning all they can to *exceed* current safety standards and industry practices. If you want to be the best on safety, have a deliberate system for keeping a watchful eye on new and better practices among your industry peers.

Empowering the Culture — Safety Technology

When safety is your culture and primary mission, you must commit appropriate resources to systems and technology—mindful that the real “return” is on enhanced lives in addition to investment dollars.

Whenever Talan buys a new piece of equipment, safety is a paramount consideration in the buying process/equation. All new equipment acquisitions are intended in large part as a pathway to enhancing some aspect of plant safety. Even major upgrades like overhead-crane redesign and reengineering are highly scrutinized from the start to ensure that safety is maximized through the investment (e.g., studying risk analysis around material-handling equipment changes).

Sensing Devices — Much of stamping-process safety involves sensors designed to prevent dies from “blowing up,” rigorously ensuring that parts are properly ejected and don’t back up. Sensor technology is also deployed to sense human presence inside machine safety perimeters and instantly shut machines down to avert injury.

Using these technologies is imperative in today’s stamping environments. They’re a critical element of any safety program and greatly enhance outcomes. But, be wary of allowing them to be used as crutches or substitutes for education, judgment, and attention.

The safety culture *informs the effective use* of sensing devices. Without a strong safety culture to stage, reinforce, and monitor safety technology, the tech is just tech. Sensing devices work best within a solid safety culture. While essential, they depend on the diligence, training, and mindset of your people. The sensors must be maintained, checked, verified, used, watched, reported on, etc. The culture and technology work together and rely on each other to enhance safety.

Standardized Controls — Reducing operator error enhances safety. When machine controls are uniform throughout the plant, safety improves as confusion is reduced. Standardization enhances safety because everyone knows how to operate every machine. This reduces mistakes by operators unfamiliar with a machine’s control panel.

At Talan we build our own control panels so all machines on our floor operate in the same way. This operational uniformity eliminates one risk area (operational differences from machine to machine). That’s an example of safety culture meeting safety technology.

Purposeful Safety — The Human Side Makes it Work

Why are we obsessive and deliberate about safety? Because it’s the right thing to do—on many levels. The safety culture saves lives, lowers costs, improves productivity, satisfaction, and recruiting, makes OSHA happy, and minimizes down time and interruptions.

Beyond those measures, the safety culture enhances our employees’ lives and prevents lives from being ruined. A safe work environment enhances productivity and work ethic because people feel safe. Knowing they’re safe—and that the company has designed every job to be as safe as it can be—employees have confidence and trust management. Working relationships are strengthened. Employees are happy and satisfied in their jobs. This makes us better.

Safety Empowers Growth and Success

It’s a good thing Talan has the safety culture it does, and all of what goes into it. Without it we couldn’t have sustained our safety record. Our high growth rate and dynamic change accentuated the need for and importance of the safety culture—which enabled and accommodated many high-

growth-related changes, disruptions, and additions. It made growth-related transitions much smoother—without compromising safety.

This is one measure of how well a strong, deliberate safety culture works.

A great safety program and culture affect every aspect of your business—growth, customer satisfaction, service capabilities, and drawing great customers and employees into the fold. You can't have absentee owners when it comes to safety. Owners themselves have to be proactive on the issue of safety—and willing to invest in it. That's how we do it at Talan.