

Janitorial Workload Newsletter



Active Listening in the workplace

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The previous newsletter and tip sheet briefly introduced Safety Leadership characteristics, so this month we will begin the series with a discussion of Active Listening.

Active listening occurs when you as a supervisor are deeply engaged and attentive to what your employee says. It requires more listening than talking.

The goal of Active Listening is to understand your employee's perspective, regardless if you agree.

Actively listening and repeating what the speaker says in your own words helps you both stay engaged and improves communication among you, your employees and their co-workers.

Management can use active listening as a tool to build better relationships with staff and prevent work place injuries.

Active Listening improves communication, working conditions, and can help prevent workplace injuries.

Management can use active listening as a tool to build better relationships with staff and prevent work place injuries. In a research interview about safety, a janitor shared a positive experience they had with their supervisor's active listening approach. They felt understood and safe because their supervisor prioritized their safety by listening to them and attending to their needs as a team.

Below is an example of a supervisor actively listening, taking action, and stopping co-worker harassment:

“And after I talked to him, [about coworker harassment], he told me to remain calm, that he would talk directly to those people. And he did, he talked to them [in another meeting]. And that helped me to feel safe. to feel comfortable at work”

In contrast, supervisors can expose workers to hazards. This occurs when they fail to actively listen and prioritize their responsibility to address safety hazards, prevent injury and reduce claims.

Maria’s daily task was to mop the office floors. She noticed her mop was starting to fall apart, and called her supervisor to ask for a new mop. The supervisor said they would order one as soon as possible. A couple of days later, the mop was deteriorating and Maria exerted more energy to clean, causing pain in her shoulders. She eventually called her supervisor again to ask for a new mop and her supervisor said they forgot to order it. Maria decided to file a claim to get treatment for her shoulder pain.

Supervisors practicing active listening prevent safety hazards and injuries for the long term. By building better relationships with staff, the employees can do their job knowing their safety concerns will be heard and addressed. The need for supervisors’ active listening and prompt response to safety hazards was a common type of interaction expressed in the janitor focus group interviews.