

# THE IMPACT OF QUESTIONS

A brief presentation at the  
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# AN OVERVIEW

In this session we will:

- Start by looking at the broad principles related to the impact of questions
- Then cover some specific examples
- Expand on using questions to influence safety
- Outline how questions could be used to get people focusing on mental health in your organisation and finish with a brief discussion exercise



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# AN OVERVIEW Cont'd

- Explain how you can use questions to influence the behaviours of:
  - Managers
  - Colleagues
  - Staff



# BOLD STATEMENT

- I believe that one of the fastest, easiest and most effective way of changing **any** aspect of an organisational culture is via the questions that leaders and others, throughout the organisation, ask



# BROAD PRINCIPLES

- Questions leaders ask have a huge impact on organisational cultures
- The questions leaders ask are perceived as reflecting what is important to the leader and staff focus on these areas
- Areas that are not asked about become perceived as unimportant



# BROAD PRINCIPLES(Cont'd)

- If there is a gap between the values a senior leader espouse and the questions asked, then people will finally concentrate on the area that the questions target, not the stated values
- People respect not what a leader expects, but what he/she inspects – and questions are one method of inspecting



# BROAD PRINCIPLES Cont'd

- Staff can use questions very effectively to influence the behaviour of leaders (Because questions result in the person being asked thinking about the issues)
- The way a question is asked (e.g. “open” or “closed”) and the manner in which it is asked have a huge impact on the outcome



# SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF THE IMPACT OF QUESTIONS

- The CEO's Christmas function speech
- Companies where senior leaders state how important safety is but only ask about production, budgets, meeting deadlines, etc
- The North Sea Production Platform Example
- The leader not asking about a seriously ill child
- The office managers and the safety observations cards



# QUESTIONS & SAFETY

- Having leaders ask about safety is crucial. The challenge is how to encourage them to do this
- One way this can be done is to ask them questions such as:
  - *“What do you think would be the quickest and easiest thing you could do to enhance safety in the organisation?”*
  - *“What impact do you consider the questions you ask about safety are having*

*on our safety culture?”*

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# QUESTIONS & SAFETY

## Cont'd

- *“How frequently do you ask safety related questions?”*
- *“How could we get all of the leaders to add questions about safety when they asking about production, timeframes, or technical issues?”*



# QUESTIONS & SAFETY

## Cont'd

- If you need to raise a concern about how safely a person or group is doing a task, start by asking a question. For example:
  - *“How safely do you feel you are working?”*
  - *“What are the safety factors that you are taking account of when doing this task?”*
  - *“What does the SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) say about the safety factors you need to take account of when doing this task?”*



# QUESTIONS & HEALTH

To bring a focus on health questions could include:

- *Our strong focus on reducing LTI's has worked well. What could we do to get people to put some focus on staying healthy and thereby reduce the cost of sick leave?"*
- *"If we introduced some incentives for people to get fit and stay healthy do you think we could structure it so that the cost benefits outweighed the actual costs?"*



# QUESTIONS & HEALTH Cont'd

- *“What could we do to inspire people to look after their health?”*



# QUESTIONS & MENTAL HEALTH

To bring a focus on mental health questions could include:

- *“A recent coroners report indicated that suicides account for more deaths per annum than road deaths. Do you think anyone in our organisation could be feeling suicidal?”*
  - \* *“How would we know?”*
  - \* *“What could we do about it?”*



# QUESTIONS & MENTAL HEALTH Cont'd

- *“There is research that shows that people with low self esteem often under perform on their potential and apparently it is common for Kiwis to lack self esteem. Do you think that the organisation could benefit if we could find some clever ways to encourage people to build their self esteem?”*



# QUESTIONS & MENTAL HEALTH Cont'd

- \* *“How could we market any programmes designed to assist in this area without putting people off by indicating that it was for people with low self esteem?”*
- \* *“What would we need to do to prove that any efforts we put into this was worthwhile?”*



# QUESTIONS & STRESS

To bring a focus on stress questions could include:

- *“I was reviewing the OSH website recently and apparently all organisations must identify their potential stress and fatigue hazards, formally record this process and put in steps to manage these hazards. What is our organisation doing in regard to this?”*



# QUESTIONS & STRESS

## Cont'd

- “What steps are we going to put in place to manage the additional stress hazards associated with this restructuring (or major project)?”*
- “If we wait for people to speak up when they are stressed then harm may of already occurred and we would be in breach of the legislation. So what do we need to do to identify situations where people could become harmed by stress, before the harm actually occurs?”*



# QUESTIONS & STRESS Cont'd

- *“How compliant do you think we are with the OSH legislation in relation to stress and fatigue?”*



# EXERCISE

- In groups of 3 – 4 discuss how you intend to use the skills outlined in this session to increase the focus that your organisation has on encouraging people to look after their mental health and stress levels.

