

ALL FOR ONE – THE MEERKAT WAY: A FRESH APPROACH TO TRAINING

BACKGROUND

All for One – The Meerkat Way has sold to over a thousand organizations worldwide, in a variety of languages. It has also featured as part of a number of awards for safety training programs. Two Australian organisations are among the safety award winners.

The pharmaceutical company, Alphapharm Pty Ltd, the winner of the 2007 National Safety Award for the Best OHS Training Program, used the meerkats as the symbol for behavioural safety awareness. The program was launched in a training room decorated as a Kalahari Desert scene and both posters and meerkat mascots (soft toys) were widely used as part of the program.

As a gold winner of the Worksafe Plan Certificate of Achievement Award, the City of Belmont provides an interesting insight into how the use of *All for One – The Meerkat Way* DVD, and the adoption of meerkats as the City's safety mascot, has had a positive impact on safety awareness.

The popularity of the program has seen the development of a newly released follow up program entitled One for All – Teamwork The Meerkat Way, which focuses on teamwork and leadership.

THE ALPHAPHARM TRAINING APPROACH

Background

Brisbane based Pharmaceutical company, Alphapharm, has grown from a company with twelve staff and four products, to a leader in the manufacture and export of Australian made pharmaceuticals. Last year, Alphapharm manufactured more than 2.5 billion tablets and capsules. It is the leading supplier of prescription medicines available through the PBS.

The Safety Initiative

A decision was made to develop and implement behavioural-based safety within Alphapharm, which involved the creation of a well structured and engaging training program aimed at the establishment of such a culture. This program was designed to provide a sustainable behavioural change and subsequent culture change which required a change in employee behaviour at all levels. Employee participation and ownership of the process was identified as being essential.

The Safety Program

The 2.5 hour training program was developed inhouse and delivered to all 560 employees at the manufacturing site located in Carole Park, Brisbane. The program was based on:

Blended delivery style – themed environment (room and presenter dress-camouflage style), use of video presentations (to reinforce concepts), computer based exercises, and team based activities.

Highly visual presentation that utilised 3 real life stories, including Meerkat learning-reenactment of a true life work accident and the consequences of the actions.

Features of the Initiative

To achieve an ongoing sustainable behavioural modification program, the Behavioural Safety training workshop needed to deliver a message that would engage and motivate staff to think safe 100% of the time.

The Meekat was adopted as Alphapharm's symbol for safety. Staff were introduced to 'The Meekat Way' based on the DVD – "All For One - The Meekat Way".

To reinforce the 'The Meekat Way' eight (8) simple principles were introduced:

Step up to Safety

Listen to your Safety Instinct

Be Consistent

Communicate

Learn from each other

No blushing

Keep Improving

Cooperate

A training room was themed to replicate the Kalahari desert and nomad tent . The room was sealed off from site use and no one allowed entry until their scheduled sessions.

Communication to site staff – training schedules communicated, Meekat images and messages placed around site (buildings & gardens). These messages were designed as "teasers" for the program.

Employees

Personal Safety – Presenting staff with a new way of thinking about safety. This can heighten their awareness of personal safety and the impact an incident can have not only on themselves and their family, but their co-workers as well.

Teamwork – looking out for one another. Good teamwork requires trust (identifying unsafe acts as having someone's best interests at heart) , respect (for anyone that identifies unsafe situations, no matter who they are) and communication (identify hazards, accept criticisms if doing an unsafe act). Following the example set by Meerkats – Interdependent Safety Culture.

Morale – knowing your co-workers and the company has your best interests at heart. This promotes an overall feeling of a workplace "family" and a commitment to adhering to safe systems of work.

Culture

The health and safety culture within Alphapharm has developed into one of a consultative and supportive nature. Staff at all levels are comfortable in challenging unsafe behaviours and accepting similar critique where necessary.

Safety Performance

The safety performance of Alphapharm has improved considerably over the past years that is demonstrated by reduced injuries and insurance premium costs. The introduction of behavioural-based safety will only serve to enhance this performance.

Program Outcomes

It is envisaged that the outcomes from this program will be a workplace that is free of injury and a workforce, through a consultative and supportive attitude, that is fully committed to a safer workplace.

Program Successes

The overall feedback received from the participants was unprecedented in Alphapharm's history. The vast majority of participants rated the training very highly.

Next.....City of Belmont Training Approach

THE CITY OF BELMONT TRAINING APPROACH

Induction

Caroline Corney, OSH Coordinator at Belmont, believes that the key to their success has been the integration of meerkats into every part of their OHS safety training, starting with their employees from the very beginning of their employment.

Employees are introduced to the meerkats by way of meerkat mascots, during their induction on their first day, and are provided with an explanation of why the meerkat is the City's safety mascot. A full day safety induction is also provided in the first week of employment.

Six Monthly Cultural Inductions

This is followed by a "cultural induction" which is run every six months for new employees. Existing employees also go through refresher courses, and all employees are reminded that safety is seen as one of their key organizational priorities and "the Meerkat Culture" is one of the City's cornerstones.

This is then again reinforced during regular OHS meetings, in which meerkat mascots are displayed in a cage. The staff are asked to provide suggestions on new safety initiatives the council could take to improve their safety. The best initiative suggestion is rewarded by having one of the meerkat mascots "released into the wild" and out of the cage (a soft toy is awarded to the employee) and into the safe work environment.

This training is combined with cross words, posters and meerkat mascot displays to work as safety reminders for the staff.

The Training Outcomes

"Safety is often hard to justify, quantify and even appreciate for its contribution to the organisation. However, by using the "All for One – The Meerkat Way" approach at the City of Belmont, an effective message has been conveyed and adopted by everyone at the City. Team members understand that safety involves shared responsibilities between management and employees. The "All for One – The Meerkat Way" highlights that people learn from each other and if we all walk the talk, safe behaviours create a supportive environment (do it and show it to be the standard). The program also reflects "Real Life" applications of how the organisation actually approaches safety, whilst at the same time providing entertainment during a learning process."

Safety Culture Outcomes

"The training approach in the past has been for the most part to satisfy and meet compliance requirements, with standard generic training packages used. We wanted to move away from this staid approach, which did not seem to capture the attention or interest of employees. By utilising and integrating the meerkat philosophy into our training and culture we have been able to successfully provide a new direction that meets all the organisational requirements and relates across all the levels of the organisation."