

SPEAKING UP ABOUT SAFETY

When silence is not an option

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“

If you see a risk and walk away,
Then hope you never have to say,
I could have saved a life that day,
But I chose to look the other way.

”

DON MERRELL – *I chose to look the
other way*

NTSAg
NON-TECHNICAL SKILLS IN AGRICULTURE



WHY IS SPEAKING UP NECESSARY?

Agriculture is known for its high rate of fatal accidents and injuries. This could be just the tip of the iceberg, however, as non-fatal injuries appear to be severely underreported in the industry.¹

- ▶ Staying silent when something is wrong on the farm can have deep negative consequences on your safety and on the safety of those around you.
- ▶ Not asking questions about risks and safety can also affect learning and development opportunities and teamwork.
- ▶ Speaking up is essential for building a **safety culture** in your workplace.

BUILDING A CULTURE OF SAFETY

Safety culture on a farm is essentially 'the way we do things around here', that is, it is the product of individual values, attitudes, and behaviours, alongside recognised safety procedure and rules, in relation to safety.

Research shows that promoting a safety climate, or culture, on the farm, by valuing workers' well-being and safety, encourages communication about mistakes and best practice.²

Speaking up about safety is an important element of safety culture: workers should feel that they can raise safety concerns, or discuss near misses, without fear of penalty.



WHY MIGHT FARM WORKERS STAY SILENT?

There are various reasons which may prevent farm workers from speaking up about safety². These include:

- ▶ Seeing risk as a normal part of life on the farm
- ▶ Fear of offending or being regarded as someone who is not part of the team
- ▶ Concerns about lack of experience or seniority
- ▶ Lack of trust in the farm manager
- ▶ Fear of penalties (such as being fired)
- ▶ Complex reporting procedures

FEAR OF SPEAKING UP IS ALSO AN ISSUE IN OTHER INDUSTRIES
EXAMPLE: HEALTHCARE

SPEAKING UP HAS BEEN SHOWN TO BE AN ISSUE IN THE OPERATING ROOM

- ▶ In one study, nurses explained that they were not used to speaking up as they were afraid or because they did not dare to do so.³
- ▶ In another study looking at surgeons in American and European hospitals, consultant surgeons were in favour of a strict hierarchy in the operating theatre – this discouraged junior staff from speaking up.⁴

YOU MAY ALSO EXPERIENCE THE SAME CHALLENGES IN YOUR WORKPLACE.

- ▶ However, this issue can be solved: The successful implementation of a new cardiac procedure for a healthcare team provided a good opportunity for nurses to ask questions. The most successful leaders in this situation were surgeons who minimized status differences and encouraged junior staff to speak up.³

OPEN DIALOGUE SHOULD ALWAYS BE MAINTAINED ON THE FARM, ESPECIALLY WHEN LEARNING SOMETHING NEW, FOR INSTANCE WHEN USING NEW EQUIPMENT.

- ▶ Acting as a leader when appropriate and being assertive is an important behavioural element of teamwork and communication for nurses.⁵
- ▶ This also applies to farming. Being assertive regarding safety as a farm worker encourages a culture of open communication.

HOW CAN NON-TECHNICAL SKILLS HELP?

Non-technical skills (NTS) are a set of thinking and social skills which complement technical knowledge, and which help you stay safe and perform tasks better.⁶

Social NTS which are generally useful in agriculture⁷ can help you promote a culture of safety as a farm manager and speak openly about risks as a farm worker.

LEADERSHIP

Directing or guiding task behaviours

– When working with junior staff, a minimum requirement would be to explain the task procedure

Lead by example – You could also demonstrate parts of the task, highlighting the safety requirements and any risks involved

Be prepared to challenge and to be challenged if something is wrong!

TEAMWORK

Communication – Sharing information about task progression and any concerns with others is extremely important in accident prevention – you can use a walkie talkie or a phone when working remotely

Do not forget that communication works both ways – listening to information and concerns is equally important!



CHALLENGING UNSAFE BEHAVIOURS ON THE FARM

Assertive communication is the ability to express concerns about safety in a manner that is both respectful and also likely to change the behaviours of others.⁸

You can communicate in this way by making an **observation**, asking for **clarification**, making a **request** or by **challenging** an action.

For example, imagine you are working with a colleague and you need to administer some simple medical treatment to cattle. You notice that they are not securing the animals properly. Here are some ways you can address the matter.

OBSERVATION – *“That cattle crush doesn’t look secure”*

CLARIFY – *“Have you ensured that the animal is secured?”*

REQUEST – *“Would you like me to help you with securing the animal?”*

CHALLENGE – *“I am concerned that you are not performing the task safely.”*

WHAT CAN YOU DO AS A LEADER?

If you are a farm owner or manager, your behaviours and attitudes will impact how your staff view risks and safety. Good leadership is essential in a positive safety climate. A few simple actions can enhance safety and encourage others to speak up.⁹

- ✓ **Support safety initiatives and encourage safety ideas on the farm.**
- ✓ **Incentivise speaking up about safety.**
- ✓ **Listen to worker concerns about safety.**
- ✓ **Implement change where required.**
- ✓ **Make sure workers are trained and safety regulations are followed.**
- ✓ **Promote the idea that a task is better delivered late than done unsafely.**
- ✓ **Lead by example.**
- ✓ **Create opportunities for employees to share their feedback.**

A FEW TAKE-HOME MESSAGES

- ▶ Always conduct a mental risk assessment – this is usually quick, but it could save your life!
- ▶ If you detect something wrong or if you deem a job unsafe, do not be afraid to speak up.
- ▶ Talking openly about poor practice, including adverse incidents and near misses, promotes a culture of learning on the farm.
- ▶ Respectfully raise issues even with senior staff members. They might have missed something which you noticed!
- ▶ Be prepared to discuss concerns raised by your colleagues regarding your own practice – this does not mean that your skills are questioned.

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