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■ by Evan Liewer

Making Safety a Priority

Two years ago, we made a simple change to our risk and safety-management training, and it decreased our workers' compensation claims by more than half! We had the policy of "Safety is No. 1" for years, but it wasn't always at the forefront of people's minds, even with that motto. The simple change we made required a "safety tip" to be shared at every team meeting. Some weeks I could be a part of five meetings, each with a different tip. By doing this, we made every employee completely aware of the importance we place on safety.

The tips would be seasonally appropriate or relevant to current operations. If it was snowy, wear your shoe chains. If we had a construction project, don't approach the heavy equipment operator from behind. If you get a spam email from a director, confirm they sent it rather than clicking the link. This transition switched our safety training from an orientation when an employee starts or learns new equipment, to always being aware.

It is this ongoing awareness that has made our staff culture one of safety. During the safety tips shared in meetings, we often ask staff to be on the lookout for other possible issues. A few year-round things our staff are always searching for are electrical lines not in conduits, chipped paint, standing water, missing smoke alarms, broken light switches, damaged vehicles, exposed nails or equipment not put away properly. We use a simple facility-management software that tracks these issues and allows staff to quickly and easily inform our safety committee and maintenance teams of the issues. If you don't have software like that, a Google form is just as sufficient.

Safety comes at a financial cost, but I have learned that money spent preventively is always cheaper than paying after the fact. Similar to the saying, "A pinch of prevention is worth a pound of cure," preventative safety is vastly superior to lawsuits and lawyer fees, increased workers' compensation rates, headaches, reactive meetings, lost future revenue, and the worst that could happen — an injured child, guest or staff member.

something to build on

I have attended more meetings on health and safety this year than almost all my previous years combined. However, I am keenly aware that if I make promises like "improved cleaning protocols" or "safety is our top priority," I will lose trust instantly if a guest sees a glaring safety risk. The intentionality of a safer facility allows a guest to be at ease. Empowering all of our team members to be aware of and on top of safety issues makes it possible for us to follow through on our promises and maintain a safer facility. ■



Evan Liewer is the senior director of guest ministries at Forest Home Christian Camps in Southern California. With 50,000 guests a year, Evan is responsible to ensure a quality retreat where the gospel is preached. Evan earned a degree in business and Bible at Biola University. He is a pastor, author and leader. He lives in Redlands, California, with his beautiful wife and two daughters.