

Real Life Stories from the Floor: Evidence-Based Training Materials for Supervisors of Young Workers

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Increasing attention has been drawn to the area of injury at work, especially in the early years of work. Youth hold a variety of jobs, exposing them to a wide range of hazardous equipment and situations. Injuries at work are frequent, and some are serious. Therefore, what young workers learn at work and how they are supervised becomes a point of concern. Schlosser (2001) contends that young workers (YWs) are at least twice as likely to have a workplace related injury compared to adult workers. Mayhew and Quinlan (2002) found that YWs tend to remember less of the training they received relating to health and safety. Furthermore, Zakocs and colleagues (1998) found that 95% of YWs interviewed wanted more safety training and that 19% felt as if they were working with dangerous equipment. Adolescents felt that training was ineffective because too much information was given at one time, the trainers were unqualified, information was presented in an inappropriate format, material was hard to read, and management showed a lack of concern about safety (Zakocs et al., 1998). In the Canadian Worker's Compensation Youth Survey (2003), only 40% of 15 to 24 year olds reported having received safety training from their employer prior to commencing work. In addition, approximately 1/3 of YWs thought they were receiving good supervision that served to protect their health and safety, and believed their supervisor was knowledgeable about health and safety issues. One of the challenges in helping workplaces is the development of evidence-based practices that can be relied upon. In-depth case studies were conducted in 15 service sector firms in Ontario from which observations regarding issues such as training, supervision, and the potential for their improvement were possible. Case studies used a multidimensional evaluation model (BRIO, Volpe, 2002) and involved site visits, participant observations, formal and informal semi-structured interviews, as well as a review of relevant business materials.

Analysis of case studies resulted in multiple transformations of the original documents in an effort to capture and transmit significant findings. Cases were first edited for language and grammar, resulting in a complete raw data case study. Cases were then converted into vignettes to present case study themes in entertaining situations. Key ideas in the vignettes were extracted from each of the cases and a two or three page story was written for each. In addition to the vignettes case study scenarios were developed to present the reader with a real-life situation, highlighting challenges common to YWs and leaving room for the reader to offer solutions to the situation. Scenarios focused on challenges around the use of Personal Protective Equipment and the pressure they felt to get a job done quickly, often at a cost to their personal safety. The lack of control YWs often have over risks they face in the workplace and their helplessness when a manager offers no safe option are issues that are also addressed in scenarios. These evidence-based tools will help assist firms provide better training and supervision of their young workers.