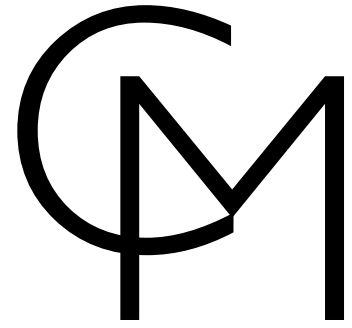


The California Merchant

News for the California Merchant Safety Association



Can we talk?

Open communication between employees and managers is critical for a successful business

By Howard Deutsch

For your company to be highly successful today and in the future, your organization needs to have highly engaged employees and a healthy culture. A healthy culture includes communication without barriers, collaboration and innovation, among many other organizational characteristics. One really important characteristic of healthy corporate cultures is the ability of all employees to speak openly and candidly with their supervisor or manager. Employees need to feel comfortable and able to suggest innovative ideas and ways to do things better, identify or report problems, request assistance when needed and suggest ways their work group/department/team can become more effective.

Even in companies that pride themselves in having a healthy corporate culture, it is very likely that some managers and supervisors stifle open upward communication. In one employee engagement survey in a financial services company with several hundred employees with average annual compensation well in excess of \$100,000, employees were asked their level of agreement with the statement "I can speak openly and candidly with my manager/supervisor." The employee survey used a 5-point scale to measure employees' level of agreement with this statement, where 5 equaled "strongly agree" and 1 equaled "strongly disagree." The overall rating for this



question was 4.22, indicating relatively strong agreement that most employees feel they can speak openly and candidly with their manager/supervisor. Some employees provided ratings of 1, 2 and 3 indicating they do not feel they can speak openly and candidly with their manager/supervisor.

Employees were given the opportunity to provide comments after this question and many of them described why they feel they can or cannot speak openly and candidly with their manager/supervisor. Following are some of the comments from employees that felt they cannot speak openly and candidly with their manager/supervisor. Does your organization have any of the types of problems described in these comments? Can you imagine how it feels to work for a manager that you cannot speak openly and candidly with, and what this means to employee and organizational effectiveness and performance? Can your organization benefit from an employee engagement survey/employee opinion survey that

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assesses a wide range of issues that impact employee and organizational effectiveness and performance, and identifies where problems exist and what needs to be done to strengthen your corporate culture, employee engagement and company's success? Here are the employee survey illustrative comments:

- I feel my manager hears but doesn't listen so I don't speak to this person half as much as I would like to.

- Am able to, theoretically, but in terms of actual availability, he's almost never available.

- I sometimes feel that when I speak to my manager I'm not taken as seriously as I feel I should be.

- I speak openly, but do not have confidence that I am heard.

- It depends on the subject.

- I am sometimes wary of being entirely candid with my manager because I often times disagree with her managerial decisions/actions.

- He is the most patient and understanding employee I have ever trained with.

- My manager is new to the group and we're still learning to work together. My early read is that his eagerness to impress his manager overrides his interactions with the team.

- I need to build the relationship first to ensure I feel I can speak openly and candidly. I am not at that point right now. He seems to be concerned with

"ruffling" feathers, so I am not sure I would be comfortable speaking about controversial issues to him.

- It depends on my manager's mood at the time. I really don't think they are looking for my opinion.

- My manager becomes somewhat annoyed when challenged. I need to be cautious when articulating opposing views to my manager in order to maintain a good relationship.

- If I or my peers see our manager 30 minutes a month it's only by accident. We have to corner our manager in the hall to get his attention.

A great, free, easy way to conduct employee surveys or collect information is by using an online form. For some tips on using forms at your workplace, see pages 3 of this newsletter.

Allergies? Use antihistamines safely at work

Spring is here! It is time to put away the heavy coats and break out the sunglasses. But the weather conditions that lead to "spring fever" also give rise to another affliction that affects many of us—hay fever.

Hay fever can make those who are sensitive to pollen miserable, interfering with work and play. Fortunately, modern medicine has developed drugs which give temporary relief from hay fever's common symptoms. As users of antihistamines and decongestants know, however, there are side effects to these over-the-counter drugs. The side effect most often experienced is drowsiness.

A Gallup survey of allergy sufferers was conducted several years ago. This survey found that the

package warnings against driving or operating heavy machinery while taking the medicine are largely ignored. If you think about it, this shouldn't be surprising—since people take the medication so that they can continue with their normal activities, and they attempt to do so.

We hope that people will be aware of the drowsiness problem and watch out for it while working or driving. However, a recent Cal-OSHA Reporter article indicates this is not the case. A University Medical Center research team conducted an allergy workshop and concluded that most workers who are trying to control their allergies with over-the-counter drugs are not aware that they are sedated. In addition to feeling drowsy, other side effects of being sedated are reduced coordination, slowed reaction time and impaired

judgment. These may be even less recognizable than drowsiness, but any of this can happen when a person is not fully alert. The use of allergy medication can also effect one's ability to focus on the work to be done by causing dizziness, nervousness, nausea or headaches.

So what can be done to reduce the discomfort of hay fever season, yet keep you effective at work? The following tips may be helpful:

Consider taking the medication for only significant allergy attacks—particularly if your job involves operating machinery or power tools.

If you need the medicine, take the smallest dose possible that will still provide a level of relief that you need.

Before taking the medication, read not only the warnings on the outer package, but also the product insert. This small piece of paper, with equally small print, usually has much more detailed information about the product and possible side effects.

Follow the recommended dosage. More is not necessarily better. Taking "extra doses" may only provide more side effects—and not more relief.

Finally, if you have any questions about allergy medication, ask your doctor or pharmacist. Spring allergies can be very uncomfortable, but an accident or injury could bring an even greater problem into your life.

There are so many uses for online forms

Creating an online form is a versatile and user-friendly process that can be customized to suit various data collection needs. Whether you're conducting surveys, collecting feedback, or organizing events, forms offer a powerful and efficient way to gather and analyze data.

Here are some ways to effectively use Google Forms in your business. (Don't use Google? The same principles apply with other free formbuilding apps, like jotform.com.)

Streamline Data Collection and Surveys

One of the primary applications of Google Forms in business is streamlining data collection and conducting surveys. With its user-friendly interface, you can easily design customized forms that suit your specific needs. For instance, you can create employee satisfaction surveys, customer feedback forms, or product evaluation questionnaires. By using Google Forms, you simplify the process of data collection, allowing you to gather insights and make data-driven decisions.

Organize Event Planning

Planning corporate events, workshops, or training sessions can be a daunting task. Google Forms can simplify the logistics and organization of such events. Create registration forms to collect attendee information, preferences, and dietary restrictions. These forms help you manage RSVPs, communicate event details, and keep all relevant information in one place. This leads to smoother event planning and execution.

Employee Feedback and Evaluations

Google Forms can be invaluable for conducting employee evaluations, performance appraisals, or gathering feedback on company policies and procedures. It offers a structured approach to performance management and feedback collection. Employees can provide input and managers can review and analyze responses, all within a secure and organized digital platform.

Customer Engagement and Feedback

In a customer-centric world, feedback and engagement are crucial. Google Forms can be used to gather feedback from customers about their experiences, preferences, and suggestions for improvement. This information can drive product development, marketing strategies, and enhance customer satisfaction.

Training and Knowledge Assessments

If your business offers training programs or requires knowledge assessments, Google Forms can be a valuable tool. Create quizzes, assessments, or surveys to gauge employee knowledge and track their progress. This allows for a systematic approach to employee development and ensures that training objectives are met.

Data Analysis and Reporting

Google Forms automatically collates responses in a structured format. You can easily export this data to Google Sheets or other data analysis tools. This simplifies the process of data analysis, allowing you to generate insights and make informed decisions based on the information collected.

Cost-Effective Solution

Perhaps one of the most appealing aspects of Google Forms is its cost-effectiveness. Many of its features are available for free, making it accessible to businesses of all sizes. For advanced features and greater customization, you can opt for a G Suite subscription, which unlocks additional capabilities.

Easy Accessibility and Sharing

Google Forms can be accessed and completed from various devices, ensuring flexibility and convenience. Share forms through email, links, or embed them on your website. This flexibility enhances accessibility for both employees and customers.

Here's a step-by-step guide on how to create a Google Form:

1. Access Google Forms:

- Open your web browser and navigate to Google Forms by visiting <https://forms.google.com>.

2. Sign In:

- If you're not already signed in to your Google account, sign in using your Gmail or Google Workspace (formerly G Suite) account.

3. Start a New Form:

- Once you're signed in, click the "+ Blank" option to start a new form. This will create a blank template for your form.

4. Form Title and Description:

- At the top of your form, you'll see fields for the Form Title and Form Description. Enter a title and description that describe the purpose of your form.

5. Add Questions:

- Click on the "Untitled Question" field to add your first question. You can choose from several question types, such as multiple-choice, short answer, paragraph, and more. Enter your question text and specify answer options as needed.

6. Customize Questions:

- For each question, you can customize options like making the question required (participants must answer), adding descriptions or help text, and randomizing answer order (for multiple-choice questions).

7. Add More Questions:

- To add more questions, click the "+" icon below your last question. You can continue to add questions and customize them to your liking.

8. Sections and Page Breaks:

Please see FORM, page 8

Conscientiously energize your workplace

In today's world, energy conservation is not just a personal responsibility; it's a collective effort that every workplace should actively engage in. By implementing energy-saving practices, businesses can reduce their carbon footprint, lower operating costs, and contribute to a more sustainable future.

Upgrade to Energy-Efficient Lighting

- One of the most effective ways to conserve energy in the workplace is by upgrading to energy-efficient lighting solutions such as LED bulbs.

- LED bulbs consume significantly less energy than traditional incandescent or fluorescent bulbs and have a longer lifespan, reducing the frequency of replacements.

- Consider installing motion sensors or timers to automatically turn off lights in unoccupied areas, further minimizing energy waste.

Optimize Heating and Cooling Systems

- Properly maintain heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems to ensure they operate efficiently.

- Regularly clean or replace air filters to improve airflow and reduce energy consumption.

- Utilize programmable thermostats to adjust temperature settings based on occupancy schedules, avoiding unnecessary heating or cooling during off-hours.

Reduce Standby Power Usage

- Encourage employees to power off computers, monitors, printers, and other electronic devices when not in use, rather than leaving them in standby mode.

- Invest in smart power strips that



automatically cut off power to peripheral devices when the primary device is turned off, preventing standby power usage.

Implement Energy-Efficient Office Equipment

- Choose energy-efficient office equipment such as ENERGY STAR-rated computers, printers, copiers, and fax machines.

- Adjust power settings on electronic devices to enable sleep or hibernate mode after periods of inactivity, further reducing energy consumption.

Promote Telecommuting and Flexible Work Schedules

- Embrace telecommuting and flexible work schedules to reduce the need for employees to commute to the office daily.

- Remote work not only saves energy but also reduces traffic congestion and lowers greenhouse gas emissions associated with transportation.

Encourage Energy-Conscious Behaviors

- Raise awareness among employees about the importance of energy conservation and encourage them to adopt energy-conscious behaviors.

- Provide training or educational materials on energy-saving practices and their impact on the environment and company finances.

Conduct Energy Audits

- Regularly conduct energy audits to identify areas of inefficiency and opportunities for improvement.

- Engage employees in the audit process to gather insights and suggestions for optimizing energy usage in the workplace.

Invest in Renewable Energy Sources

- Explore opportunities to invest in renewable energy sources such as solar panels or wind turbines to generate clean, sustainable energy onsite.

- Renewable energy investments not only reduce reliance on fossil fuels but also offer long-term cost savings and environmental benefits.

Conserving energy at work is not only a responsible business practice but also a strategic investment in sustainability and cost savings. By implementing the strategies outlined above, businesses can significantly reduce their energy consumption, minimize environmental impact, and create a more eco-friendly workplace culture. Let's commit to energizing our workplaces with smart energy-saving practices for a greener and brighter future.

Strategies for worker's comp claims

Workers' compensation claims can be a significant burden for companies, both financially and operationally. However, with effective strategies in place, businesses can mitigate risks, improve safety measures, and streamline the claims process. In this article, we'll explore key strategies that companies can implement to deal with workers' compensation claims efficiently.

1. Establish a Comprehensive Safety Program:

- Prevention is the best strategy when it comes to managing workers' compensation claims. Companies should prioritize workplace safety by implementing comprehensive safety programs.

- Conduct regular safety training sessions for employees to educate them about potential hazards and safe work practices.

- Encourage a culture of safety where employees feel empowered to report safety concerns and near-miss incidents promptly.

2. Conduct Regular Risk Assessments:

- Regular risk assessments help identify potential hazards in the workplace and take proactive measures to mitigate them.

- Evaluate equipment, machinery, and work processes regularly to ensure they meet safety standards and comply with regulations.

- Involve employees in the risk assessment process as they can provide valuable insights into potential safety risks in their respective work areas.

3. Provide Proper Safety Equipment:

- Ensure that employees have access to appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as helmets, gloves, goggles, and safety harnesses.

- Regularly inspect and maintain



safety equipment to ensure its effectiveness.

- Train employees on the proper use and maintenance of safety equipment to maximize its benefits.

4. Implement Return-to-Work Programs:

- Develop structured return-to-work programs that facilitate the smooth transition of injured employees back to the workplace.

- Offer modified duties or alternative tasks that accommodate the injured employee's capabilities while they recover.

- Communicate openly with injured employees to understand their needs and provide necessary support during their rehabilitation process.

5. Maintain Accurate Documentation:

- Accurate documentation is crucial for effectively managing workers' compensation claims. Maintain detailed records of workplace incidents, injuries, and near misses.

- Document all safety training sessions, risk assessments, and safety equipment inspections.

- Keep thorough records of workers' compensation claims, including injury reports, medical records, and communication with insurance providers.

6. Partner with Experienced Professionals:

- Collaborate with experienced professionals such as occupational health and safety consultants, legal advisors, and insurance providers.

- Seek guidance from professionals who specialize in workers' compensation claims management to navigate complex legal and regulatory requirements.

- Stay informed about changes in workers' compensation laws and regulations to ensure compliance and mitigate potential risks.

7. Foster Open Communication:

- Establish channels for open communication between management, employees, and relevant stakeholders regarding safety concerns and workers' compensation claims.

- Encourage employees to report workplace hazards, injuries, and near misses without fear of reprisal.

- Provide regular updates to employees on safety initiatives, claim status, and company policies related to workers' compensation.

Effective management of workers' compensation claims requires a proactive approach to workplace safety, thorough documentation, and open communication. By implementing these strategies, companies can reduce the frequency and severity of workplace injuries, minimize the financial impact of claims, and create a safer and healthier work environment for employees. Additionally, fostering a culture of safety and support can enhance employee morale and productivity, ultimately benefiting the company's bottom line.

Get stuck into spring cleaning and organizing

As the weather warms up and flowers bloom, many people embark on their annual spring cleaning routines. Here are some tasks that may be overlooked, and how to know what to keep and what to toss when you tidy up those cupboards.

Clean overlooked, neglected areas

1. Clean Light Fixtures and Ceiling Fans:

- Light fixtures and ceiling fans accumulate dust and dirt over time, affecting air quality and overall cleanliness.

- Use a microfiber cloth or duster to wipe down light fixtures, removing dust and grime.

- For ceiling fans, use a damp cloth or vacuum with a brush attachment to clean both the blades and the motor housing.

2. Wash Window Treatments:

- Window treatments such as curtains, drapes, and blinds can trap dust, allergens, and pet hair.

- Remove curtains and drapes and launder them according to the manufacturer's instructions.

- For blinds, wipe them down with a damp cloth or use a vacuum with a brush attachment to remove dust and debris.

3. Deep Clean Upholstered Furniture:

- Upholstered furniture can harbor dust mites, allergens, and spills that accumulate over time.

- Use a upholstery cleaner or a mixture of mild detergent and water to spot clean stains and spills.

- Vacuum upholstered furniture thoroughly, paying attention to crevices and seams where dirt can accumulate.

4. Scrub Baseboards and Moldings:

- Baseboards and moldings are



often overlooked during regular cleaning but can accumulate dust, pet hair, and grime.

- Use a damp cloth or sponge to wipe down baseboards and moldings, removing dirt and buildup.

- For stubborn stains or grime, use a mild cleaning solution and a soft-bristled brush to scrub the surface gently.

5. Clean Behind Appliances:

- Over time, dust, crumbs, and grease can accumulate behind appliances such as refrigerators, stoves, and washing machines.

- Move appliances away from the wall and vacuum or sweep behind them to remove debris.

- Wipe down the back and sides of appliances with a damp cloth to remove dust and grease buildup.

6. Refresh Mattresses and Pillows:

- Mattresses and pillows can harbor dust mites, sweat, and allergens, impacting sleep quality and comfort.

- Vacuum mattresses and pillows thoroughly to remove dust and debris.

- Spot clean stains with a mixture of mild detergent and water, then allow the mattress or pillow to air dry completely.

7. Inspect and Clean Air Vents:

- Air vents can become clogged with dust and debris, reducing the efficiency of heating and cooling systems.

- Remove vent covers and vacuum inside the ducts using a brush attachment.

- Wipe down vent covers with a damp cloth to remove dust and grime before reattaching them.

Organizing? What to keep and what to toss

Clutter can accumulate quickly, leading to decreased productivity and increased stress levels. Streamlining your workspace not only enhances efficiency but also fosters a clear and focused mindset.

What to Keep:

1. Essential Tools and Equipment:

- Identify tools and equipment necessary for your daily tasks and keep them easily accessible.

- This may include computers, printers, scanners, phones, and any specialized tools relevant to your profession.

2. Important Documents:

- Maintain a system for organizing and storing important documents such as contracts, client information, financial records, and company policies.

- Invest in digital storage solutions to minimize paper clutter and ensure easy access to essential documents.

3. Office Supplies:

- Keep a sufficient stock of office

Please see CLEANING, page 8

SAFETY ... IT PAYS



Batteries present a multitude of hazards

Explosive hydrogen... Acidic liquids and vapors... Electrical burns... Strains, sprains, hernias and compressed discs. All of these hazards arise when servicing, charging, or jumping the common lead-acid battery found in cars and trucks. The hazards can be minimized by following a few common sense safety rules.

Eye Protection: First, always wear safety goggles or a face shield when working around a battery. Batteries contain corrosive acids that are capable of eating away metals. It takes just one droplet to cause serious eye damage. Just popping open the vent cap may throw out a droplet. A short or faulty regulator can cause the electrolyte to boil, releasing acid vapors. A fault within the battery could cause it to explode, throwing fragments of the case and acid.

Fire Protection: Lead-acid batteries produce flammable hydrogen gas while being charged. This highly explosive

gas, generated within the cells, will expand and seep out of the vent caps. A cigarette, tool, or spark from any source could ignite the gas, causing the battery to explode. Always charge in a well ventilated area. Remember too that the battery is receiving a charge and releasing hydrogen when the car is running, not just when hooked up to a battery charger.

Jump Starting: Dead batteries in cars and trucks are not uncommon- particularly in winter. The first thought is to get a jump start. When jumping a battery, remember the following safeguards:

Be sure all electrical equipment is off. If you connect the jumper battery while a load is being drawn, a spark could occur.

Check the battery fluid level. If the plates are exposed, add water until they are covered. Never add acid.

Make sure both batteries are of the same voltage.

Make sure vent caps are in place to prevent electrolyte splash.

Use good quality jumper cables- at least 10-gauge wire.

Always be sure of your polarity when arranging the jumper cables:

Connect the first cable to the positive (+) terminal of the good battery; then attach the other end of that cable to the positive (+) terminal of the dead battery.

Next, attach the second cable to the negative (-) terminal of the good battery, and make the fourth and last connection to a clean metal part, such as the engine block of the car being energized, rather than to its negative battery terminal. This completes the electrical circuit, as if it were connected to the dead battery, but if sparks are produced, it serves to keep them away from any explosive battery gases.

Never lay your tools on top of the battery. They could come in contact with both posts, or the positive post and a ground, creating a short.

Protect Your Back: Batteries are heavy. If you must move one, use a battery strap as a handle, keep your back straight- don't bend at the waist--and tighten your stomach muscles as you lift. Don't twist your spine as you lift or move it.

Remember that these rules apply both on and off the job. The batteries in your own vehicle or on your boat are just as potentially dangerous. Respect the hazards and take no chances or short cuts!

OSHA CORNER

Please visit the following address on the web to download helpful safety posters, guides and pamphlets for a safer workplace.

<https://www.osha.gov/publications>



Form: Responses can be exported in sheet format

- If your form has multiple sections, consider using page breaks to separate them. Click the "Add section" icon to create new sections with their own set of questions.

9. Upload Images and Videos:

- You can include images or videos in your form to provide context or illustrate questions. Use the image and video icons in the question editor to upload or link to media.

10. Organize Questions:

- Click and drag questions to rearrange their order. This allows you to create a logical flow in your form.

11. Preview Your Form:

- To preview your form and see

how it will appear to participants, click the "Preview" button in the upper-right corner.

12. Form Settings:

- Click on the gear icon in the upper-right corner to access the form settings. Here, you can configure options like limiting responses, collecting email addresses, and customizing response messages.

13. Theme and Color Scheme:

- To change the appearance of your form, click the "Color palette" icon in the upper-right corner. You can select a theme or customize the color scheme to match your branding.

14. Send or Share Your Form:

- Once your form is ready, you can

send it to respondents. Click the "Send" button in the upper-right corner to access options for sharing your form via email, a link, social media, or by embedding it on a website.

15. Collect Responses:

- As responses come in, you can view and analyze them in real-time by clicking on the "Responses" tab at the top of the form. You can also export the data to Google Sheets for further analysis.

16. Edit and Manage Your Form:

- You can always go back to your form to edit, add, or remove questions by returning to Google Forms and selecting your form from the list of saved forms.

Cleaning: Toss old tech, old papers, old stuff

supplies such as pens, paper, notebooks, staplers, and tape to support daily operations. Resupply inventory and restock as needed to avoid running out of essential items.

4. Personalized Items:

- Personalize your workspace with items that inspire and motivate you, such as photos, artwork, or plants. Choose items that contribute positively to your work environment without causing distraction or clutter.

5. Ergonomic Furniture:

- Invest in ergonomic furniture such as chairs, desks, and keyboard trays to support proper posture and minimize the risk of

discomfort or injury. Arrange furniture in a way that promotes efficient workflow and maximizes available space.

What to Toss:

1. Outdated Technology:

- Dispose of outdated technology or equipment that no longer serves a functional purpose. Consider recycling or donating old electronics to minimize environmental impact.

2. Excessive Paperwork:

- Declutter your workspace by purging unnecessary paperwork, old notes, and outdated documents. Implement a digital filing system to

organize and archive essential documents, reducing reliance on paper storage.

3. Broken or Unused Items:

- Discard broken or unused items that take up valuable space in your workspace. Be ruthless in your assessment and remove anything that does not contribute to your productivity or well-being.

4. Distracting Decorations:

- Evaluate decorative items in your workspace and remove any that cause distraction or clutter. Opt for minimalist decor that

enhances your focus and creativity without overwhelming your senses.

5. Unnecessary Office Supplies:

- Streamline your office supplies by eliminating items that are rarely used or redundant. Donate excess supplies to colleagues or community organizations to reduce waste and support sustainability efforts.

By adopting a proactive approach to decluttering and organizing your work environment, you can create a more functional and harmonious space that promotes productivity and well-being.

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