

TAKING SAFETY HOME

Building Habits That Protect Workers Around the Clock

By Jeremy R. Abbott

For decades, safety professionals have worked to strengthen organizational cultures, reduce incident rates and create environments where workers return home safely every day. But what happens after employees go home?

Injury statistics consistently show that a large proportion of serious injuries occur away from work: at home, on the road or during recreational activities. According to the National Safety Council (NSC, 2024), more than half of all preventable injuries and fatalities in the U.S. occur off the job. These incidents have the same consequences as workplace injuries: pain, lost income, restricted duty, and emotional strain for families and coworkers. The difference is that they rarely appear in safety dashboards or annual reports.

When employees come to work after experiencing or witnessing unsafe conditions at home, they bring that stress and distraction with them. Fatigue, pain or emotional distress can directly influence decision-making and situational awareness on the job. In that sense, the boundary between home and workplace safety is more porous than many leaders realize (Geller, 2001).

Forward-thinking organizations are recognizing that a culture of safety must travel home with employees. The same habits, awareness and shared values that prevent incidents at work can help employees protect themselves, their families and their communities when they are off the clock. This is the next evolution of safety leadership.

BUILD A SAFETY CULTURE THAT EXTENDS HOME

- Reinforce consistent messaging.** Use the same core safety principles, such as awareness, planning and accountability, in both work and personal examples.
- Empower peer influence.** Encourage team members to speak up respectfully when they see unsafe behaviors, even if they occur outside the workplace.
- Recognize everyday wins.** Celebrate examples of workers demonstrating safe behavior at home during meetings or in newsletters.
- Leverage technology.** Use apps, videos or online forums to share short safety reminders that employees can access anywhere.
- Support emotional well-being.** Normalize discussion of mental health and offer employee resources to create a climate of safety.
- Connect to purpose.** Reinforce the “why”: protecting people we care about. When employees are able to see that purpose clearly, safety becomes intrinsic.

Why Home Safety Matters to Organizations

Off-the-job injuries can have measurable business impacts. NSC (2024) estimates that preventable non-work injuries cost U.S. employers more than \$300 billion annually in lost productivity, absenteeism and healthcare expenses. Those numbers do not account for the human toll of missed family events, medical stress and the ripple effects that influence morale and productivity.

Organizations that care deeply about safety cannot afford to limit their concern to what happens inside their gates. When leaders advocate for total well-being, they send a powerful message that safety is not compliance, it is compassion.

Several industries already recognize this connection. Utility companies, construction firms and manufacturers have long promoted off-the-job safety campaigns that emphasize home hazard awareness, safe driving and family preparedness. These initiatives are not about control, they are about care. They help employees understand that safety is a lifestyle, not a checklist.

Habits Do Not Know Boundaries

Human behavior is remarkably consistent. The choices people make on the job often mirror the choices they make at home. If a worker takes shortcuts when climbing a ladder in their garage, they are likely taking similar shortcuts at work. Conversely, if they have built habits of awareness, planning and care, those traits carry over into every aspect of life.

Behavior-based safety programs and human performance models both reinforce the idea that habits drive outcomes. As Reason (1997, p. 12) explains, “the same cognitive and organizational factors that lead to workplace incidents often exist in everyday life.” People do not suddenly become unsafe after they leave work; they simply act according to the patterns they have developed. Leaders who want to reduce incidents should focus on strengthening those patterns through reinforcement, storytelling and example so that safe decisions become automatic.

The most effective safety cultures do not separate work life and home life. Instead, they emphasize personal responsibility and shared influence. Every decision—whether it is fastening a seat belt, turning off equipment or using a ladder correctly—reflects an individual’s values and awareness. Organizations that frame safety as a shared value rather than an enforced rule see those values naturally extend beyond the workplace (Geller, 2001).

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Connecting safety culture to family well-being can turn abstract policies into personal commitments.

Leading by Example: When Leadership Is Personal

Leadership sets the tone. Employees watch how supervisors, managers and executives behave more than they listen to what they say. When leaders consistently demonstrate that safety is important in their own lives, it reinforces authenticity and trust.

Leaders can model this in multiple ways:

- sharing personal stories about home or family safety experiences
- discussing lessons learned from near-misses or incidents outside of work
- demonstrating that it is acceptable and encouraged to prioritize safety over convenience, even when no one is watching

Simple gestures matter. When a manager wears safety glasses during a short walk-through or pauses a meeting to fix a tripping hazard, they communicate that safety is nonnegotiable. That same authenticity can extend beyond the workplace. By mentioning a home fire drill or a family first aid kit, leaders normalize the idea that safe choices belong everywhere. The message is clear: safety is not something we do, it is something we are.

Making It Personal: Engaging Employees & Families

Employees are more likely to internalize safety principles when those principles affect the people they care about. Connecting safety culture to family well-being can turn abstract policies into personal commitments.

Practical strategies include:

- **Family safety days.** Invite employees to bring family members for interactive sessions on emergency preparedness, home hazard awareness or defensive driving.
- **Seasonal campaigns.** Distribute checklists for winterizing homes, grilling safety tips or back-to-school driving reminders.

- **Take-home materials.** Encourage teams to discuss topics such as fire escape plans, child safety seats or safe use of household chemicals.

- **Recognition programs.** Highlight employees who model off-the-job safety behaviors such as teaching children to wear helmets or volunteering for community safety events.

- **Community partnerships.** Collaborate with local fire departments, Red Cross chapters, or health agencies to reinforce safety education (NSC, 2024).

When employees share these ideas with their families, they not only protect loved ones but also strengthen the company's identity as a caring, human-centered organization.

Integrating Off-the-Job Safety Into Workplace Culture

Integrating home safety does not require a separate program; it is about broadening the context of existing initiatives.

For example:

- **Toolbox talks.** Include a short home safety tip at the end of meetings.

- **Incident reviews.** When discussing root causes, note whether similar risks could appear in home settings.

- **Training modules.** Use relatable scenarios such as ladder safety or chemical storage that apply to both environments.

- **Wellness initiatives.** Pair physical and mental health topics with personal safety themes such as ergonomics or stress management (Geller, 2001).

These efforts enhance safety awareness and demonstrate genuine care. Employees notice when leadership values their safety as human beings, not just as workers. This fosters trust, loyalty and engagement, which in turn strengthens operational performance.

The Role of Mental & Emotional Safety

Physical safety is only one dimension of a holistic culture. Emotional well-being, including stress management, psychological safety and balance, also plays a crucial role. Employees facing high stress or poor sleep are statistically more prone to errors, both at work and at home (Reason, 1997).

Leaders should normalize discussions about mental health and decision-making awareness as part of safety culture. Encouraging open dialogue, offering resources and modeling vulnerability help create a climate where people feel supported. A healthy mind supports safer choices, no matter the setting.

Challenges & Opportunities

Extending safety beyond the workplace can initially be met with skepticism. Some employees may see it as an invasion of privacy or a distraction from core business goals. The key is framing the message around empowerment, not enforcement. This is not about controlling what people do at home. It is

about helping them bring the same care and awareness that keep them safe at work into every part of their lives.

Leaders should focus on storytelling, empathy and shared benefit. When people understand that off-the-job safety supports their families and communities, participation rises naturally. Over time, this approach transforms safety from a requirement into a shared identity (ASSP, 2023).

A Culture That Travels Home

The ultimate goal of any safety program is not simply to reduce numbers; it is to protect people. That mission does not end at the facility gate or the parking lot. A mature safety culture recognizes that every employee is part of a broader network of relationships, responsibilities and environments.

When organizations encourage safe habits at home, they gain more than a decrease in incidents. They cultivate teams that are resilient, mindful and united by shared values. Workers who practice safety in all areas of life return to work more focused, rested and prepared. Leaders who model safety as a personal value inspire loyalty and trust.

Safety that begins at work and continues at home creates a powerful loop of reinforcement.

Employees take lessons home, apply them with their families, and bring that heightened awareness back to the workplace. It is a continuous cycle of care, learning and responsibility. Ultimately, a culture of safety without borders is not just good practice; it is good humanity. **PSJ**

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