



CASE STUDY

Union Pacific

Reducing injuries and improving culture

Situation

Union Pacific Railroad's San Antonio Service Unit (SASU) is responsible for operating freight trains from Alpine in west Texas to Eagle Lake in the east, and from Hearne in the north to the Mexican border at Laredo. This geographical area represents a combined distance of over 800 miles. Nearly 1,000 employees operate the unit, most serving as engineers and conductors.

In December of 2004 the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), BST, and Union Pacific management and union leaders met in San Antonio to discuss a pilot project. As a result of recent collisions and major derailments FRA was willing to sponsor a multi-level safety intervention at the service unit. The project was initially focused on improving what Union Pacific identifies as "Cab Red Zone" performance in road operations. Cab Red Zone is defined as a time frame that requires increased vigilance from the train crew while operating a train, for example when approaching a section of track where a repair crew is present. Cab Red Zone is similar to the high vigilance required by airline pilots during takeoff and landing.

Solution

Union Pacific was very receptive to the FRA's offer – the company has long been an advocate of safety and uses the term Total Safety Culture to describe its corporate safety outlook. The first element of the project focused on aligning Union Pacific's senior leaders in support of safety, using assessment, development, coaching, and training activities. The second phase of the project engaged first-level managers in safety, primarily by developing leadership skills that would support their role as safety leaders. BST delivered a leadership assessment for each manager and conducted focused development workshops around critical skills such as communications and improving trust. In the final element of the project, BST helped Union Pacific develop and deploy an employee-engagement effort that captured data on exposures. The labor steering committee named this process Changing At-risk Behavior (CAB).

In early 2005, Union Pacific selected a steering committee and two facilitators to lead the CAB process. The selections reflected the diverse population and union representation

at the Service Unit and included committee members and facilitators from the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) and United Transportation Union (UTU). The steering committee also included Union Pacific management, who saw the project as an opportunity not only to improve safety, but also to improve the relationship between labor and management.

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Results

Three years after the initiation of the CAB process, the project produced tangible and encouraging improvements in culture, injuries and safety. Union Pacific uses a monitoring program called Field Training Exercise (FTX) to determine adherence to the Cab Red Zone (CRZ) process and other rule requirements. Post-project, FTX observations of CRZ requirements showed a near 50% reduction in failures.

Both employees and managers believe that labor/management relations have improved significantly. General director of operating practices and original management sponsor Mike Mitchell commented, “In my entire railroad career of slightly over 40 years, I had never seen the cooperation between labor and management that I had the pleasure of working with in conjunction with the CAB process.” Leaders credit the CAB process’ strong operator ownership.

Between 2006 to 2007 there was a 20% reduction in personal injuries. From 2007 to 2008 there was a further 33% reduction. Derailments are down 38%, decertifications 70%, and lost work days 40%. General superintendent Brian

At a Glance:

- Union Pacific Railroad’s San Antonio Service Unit (SASU) employs nearly 1,000 people.
- Recent collisions and major derailments prompted the FRA to sponsor a new safety initiative at the service unit.
- The project has produced tangible and encouraging improvements in culture, injuries and safety.
- From 2006 to 2007 there was a 20% reduction in personal injuries. This positive trend continued; from 2007 to 2008 with an additional 33% reduction.

Gorton describes the process as a long-term success and is self sustainability with the ownership and dedication of both employees at Union Pacific Management.

In its fourth year, FRA Administrator Joseph Boardman awarded the San Antonio Service Unit the Department of Transportation’s Distinguished Public Service Award. Fellow recipients included sister site, the Livonia Service Unit (LVSU), based near Baton Rouge. Like SASU, LVSU is also a BST client site. The LVSU process, known as STEEL, was launched a year after San Antonio with help from a BST consultant Boardman commended the United Transportation Union, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, and Union Pacific railroad for their partnership in both locations. Working together, these groups helped achieve an 80% reduction in at-risk behaviors.

The two projects represent an encouraging approach to the railroad industry and have convinced the FRA that other railroads that want to pursue a similar approach will have their support. FRA has termed these types of programs as CSA, or Clear Signal for Action.