

Case Study 10: You're Not Going to Like This, But . . .

Background

Baker Brothers Construction is a medium-sized building contractor. Like any contractor, they are very concerned about the safety of their employees, but unfortunately, incidents do happen. In the past year they experienced a few more safety incidents than usual, and the provincial Ministry of Labour has required that they do a safety audit.

This audit is an enormous undertaking; it requires a written report that describes in intricate detail the safety measures the company has in place. There are 20 categories ranging from “Hazard Identification and Control” to “Health and Safety Education and Training.” Each section of the audit is worth a varying number of points, adding up to 1,000. An inspector visits to see that everything is in order and looks for the implementation of measures in each category. The disheartening part of the visit is that companies are told upfront that they will probably fail the first audit.

Current Situation

Sarah Garneau, the head of human resources at Baker Brothers, is in charge of the audit, both the written report and the inspector's visit. A successful audit requires the co-operation of everyone in the company, from office employees, to site supervisors, to the individual workers. Everyone has to pull together. Somehow, Sarah has to convince everyone in the company to take the audit seriously and to do the extra work that it requires. Two failed audits and the company could be shut down. Even though the senior employees are dedicated to maintaining safe job sites, many of them don't like safety inspectors because they feel that they simply like to “throw their weight around” and report them for the most minor infractions. Some of the other workers feel that it isn't their problem—they put in their eight hours and they don't want to do anything more.

Sarah decides to draft a memo to make sure everyone is informed about what they need to do.

Exhibit A

Interoffice Memo

Date: May 5, 2021

To: All employees

From: Sarah Garneau

Subject: Safety Audit

At Baker Brothers we pride ourselves on our safety record. Recently, though, a few more incidents than usual drew the attention of the Ministry of Labour and they have consequently required us to perform a safety audit.

The safety audit occurs in two sections. The first is a report describing in detail what safety measures we have in place. This report is the responsibility of the office personnel. Kailani and George will do most of the research and writing and will report to me.

The second part of the audit is a visit by a Ministry inspector. He or she will visit our office and randomly select two or three job sites to visit. The inspector will be looking to see that we comply with all the workplace safety codes.

We all need to help make this audit a success. I will be sending specific details as they become available about what needs to be done. However, there are some basic things that we can do daily to make the process go smoothly. Supervisors, you can pull and label any equipment that you find that may not comply with code; you can gather your first aid certificates and other tickets that have to do with safety and have them ready when we need them. Office personnel can make sure signage is up-to-date and can clear away clutter in the office. Everyone can keep their eyes open for actual or potential problems and report them.

No one wants to see anyone injured on the job; we need to make our workplace as safe as it can be, not just for this audit, but for ourselves. We need to make it less likely that “accidents will happen.”

Activities and Discussion

1. What was Sarah’s biggest pre-writing challenge?
2. Analyze the memo in terms of cross-functional teams. Is there evidence of cross-functional conflict?
3. Should Sarah have mentioned the probability of failure? Why or why not?
4. How would you have written this memo? List at least three things you would have done differently and explain why.
5. Why does Sarah not tell the others what a huge undertaking the written report is? Do you think she was right to leave out this information?
6. Should Sarah have used the threat of being shut down to reinforce the importance of the audit? Why or why not?