

Leadership Safety Engagement

Field guide · Carry it, do not read from it

HSE ADVISOR CANADA

hseadvisor.ca

Leader: _____

Position: _____

Work area visited: _____

Date: _____

THIS IS NOT AN AUDIT

AN AUDIT	AN ENGAGEMENT
Looks for non-compliance	Seeks to understand the work
Leader is the expert	Worker is the expert on their own task and risk
Findings flow one way	Two-way conversation
Produces a list	Produces trust, and a commitment the leader owns
Worker says as little as possible	Worker volunteers what they would not have raised

Canadian OHS legislation rests on the Internal Responsibility System, and that system cannot run on top-down enforcement. It needs genuine two-way communication — which is precisely what an audit posture prevents.

BEFORE YOU WALK OUT — PREPARE

- ☐ Correct PPE on, worn correctly. You are being watched from the moment you arrive.
- ☐ Phone away. Not in your hand, not face-up in your pocket.
- ☐ Enough time blocked that you are not visibly rushing.
- ☐ No clipboard of findings from last time.
- ☐ You know the crew's names, or you are going to ask and use them.
- ☐ You have decided in advance that you are not there to correct anything minor.

THE TWO QUESTIONS THAT CARRY THE MOST WEIGHT

ASK THIS	WHY IT MATTERS
“What do you need to be safer and more effective?”	Highest-weighted item on the worker-side scorecard. It treats the worker as the person who knows.
“What is the most dangerous part of your job today?”	Equally weighted. Surfaces live risk that no inspection schedule would have reached this week.

Ask, then stop talking. The most common failure is a leader asking a good question and filling the silence before the worker has decided whether it is safe to answer honestly.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS WORTH HAVING READY

- ☐ “Walk me through how this job actually gets done — not how the procedure says.”
- ☐ “What is the workaround everybody uses here?”
- ☐ “What nearly went wrong recently that never got written up?”
- ☐ “If you stopped this job right now, what would happen to you?”
- ☐ “What have you raised before that nothing happened about?”
- ☐ “What would make this easier to do the right way than the fast way?”

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

SIGNAL	WHAT IT USUALLY MEANS
Hesitation before answering	The worker is calculating whether honesty is safe. Your next response sets the answer for everyone watching.
“We just deal with it”	A normalised workaround. Ask what it costs them.
Deferring to the supervisor	Low psychological safety, or an audience problem. Consider a quieter setting.
“I mentioned it once”	A previous report went nowhere. Find out what happened to it before anything else.
Detailed, specific risk description	You have found your subject matter expert. Keep going.

THE TRUST GAP

Canadian workplace surveys have found workers markedly less comfortable raising psychological safety concerns than physical ones — roughly 38 per cent comfortable with physical risk against 29 per cent for psychological risk in one 2022 report. If your engagements only ever surface physical hazards, that gap is the reason, not an absence of concerns.

FOLLOW-THROUGH RECORD — THE PART THAT DECIDES WHETHER IT WORKED

WHAT THE WORKER RAISED	WHAT I COMMITTED TO	OWNER	DUE	CLOSED AND TOLD THEM?

An engagement with no follow-through is worse than no engagement. It teaches the crew that speaking up costs time and changes nothing — and the next leader who walks out there inherits that.

LEADER SIGNATURE

DATE

REVIEWED WITH SUPERVISOR

DATE