# 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.

## TWO QUESTIONS TO ASK EVERY TIME

| ASK THIS | WHY IT MATTERS |
|---|---|
| **"What do you need to be safer and more effective?"** | It treats the worker as the person who knows. |
| **"What is the most dangerous part of your job today?"** | It 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

> In a March 2022 Mental Health Research Canada survey of about 1,600 employed Canadians who do not manage others, 38 per cent said they would always feel comfortable speaking to their leader about risks to their physical safety. For risks to their psychological safety, the figure was 29 per cent. If your engagements only ever surface physical hazards, this gap may be part of the reason. Source: Mental Health Research Canada (2022), Psychologically Safe Leaders Assessment, non-managers’ report.

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

| WHAT THE WORKER RAISED | WHAT I COMMITTED TO | OWNER | DUE | CLOSED AND TOLD THEM? |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
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> **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 _____

### Want help applying this?

Our consultants (CRSP Certified · COR & ISO 45001 Lead Auditors) can adapt this to your workplace or review your safety program with you.

**(647) 620-5278** · **info@hseadvisor.ca** · **hseadvisor.ca/contact**

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