

Retain Workers, Boost Safety: The Science and Strategy

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President and Co-founder
Whistle Rewards



June 11, 2025 Webinar



National Safety Month (NSM) at NSC

- Next Webinar:
 - Annual Workplace Safety Summit: Innovation to Application
 - Tues, June 24th at 12pm CT/ 1pm EST
- Explore all NSM resources at NSC [here](#)



JUNE 1-7



Continuous
Improvement

JUNE 8-14



Employee
Engagement

JUNE 15-21



Roadway Safety

JUNE 22-30



Wellbeing

Sponsored by



The Future of EHS 2025 | STL

WORKtoZERO

an **nsc** program

Eliminating fatality risk with technology

Work to Zero works to eliminate workplace fatalities by 2050 through the adoption of emerging technology.



The Future of EHS 2025 | STL

Who do we serve?

- Companies and organizations operating in non-transportation, high risk industries such as construction and materials moving occupations
- Technology solution providers ready to bring their innovative technologies to market



Research

Deepen our knowledge in how technology can improve worker safety

Education

Help employers integrate new technologies to support workplace safety

Partnerships

Expand reach and impact through industry collaborations

WEBINAR: WED. JUNE 11th at Noon CST

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RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB

Whistle Rewards is a rewards and recognition platform designed for the construction and industrial sector.

Proven to impact

- ✓ Safety compliance
- ✓ Technology adoption
- ✓ Performance
- ✓ Retention

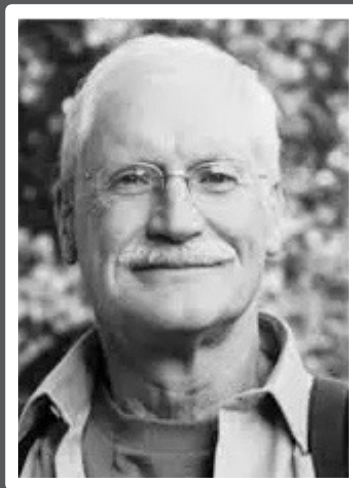
**TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE NSC
20% DISCOUNT**



Property of Whistle Systems Inc.

DOPAMINE

Arvid Carlsson, Wolfram Schultz and dopamine



- Dopamine is a neurotransmitter essential for regulating movement, motivation, and reward in the brain.
- Arvid Carlsson, Swedish pharmaceutical scientist won the Nobel prize in 2002 for his dopamine research.
- 1990s Wolfram Schultz, professor of neuroscience at University of Cambridge recognized the "reward" function of dopamine.

Dopamine is important to safety and retention because has a big influence on behavior

THINGS OUR BRAINS LIKE → DOPAMINE → FEEL GOOD

- Social connection
- Delicious foods
- Exercise
- Achievement



There are not positive feelings associated with new behaviors.

THINGS OUR BRAINS LIKE → DOPAMINE → FEEL GOOD

- Social connection
- Delicious foods
- Exercise
- Achievement



NEW THINGS

- New Procedures
- Technology Adoption
- Compliance

How do you feel?

How do you feel?



Things unfamiliar to us creates a stress response and our brain produces adrenaline and cortisol.

NEW THINGS

- New Procedures
- Technology Adoption
- Compliance



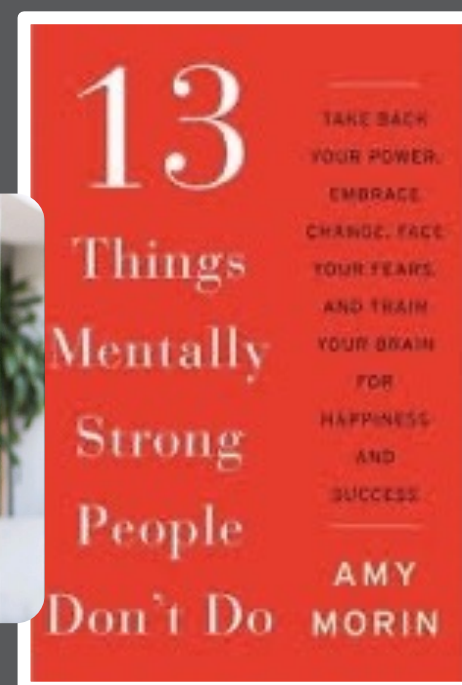
—————→ **ADRENALINE | CORTISOL** → **STRESS**

A group of industrial workers, mostly men, are gathered in a factory or warehouse setting. They are wearing hard hats (yellow and blue) and orange safety vests over grey t-shirts. They are all looking towards a man in a dark suit and light blue shirt who is holding a clipboard and pointing at it. The background shows industrial equipment and large windows. The workers have serious expressions, suggesting they are listening to an important instruction or safety briefing.



According to psychotherapist and author Amy Morin, fear of change is #1 thing holding people back in life

1. Change
2. Loneliness
3. Failure
4. Rejection
5. Uncertainty
6. Something bad happening
7. Getting hurt
8. Being judged
9. Inadequacy
10. Loss of Freedom



The stress people feel from change is a barrier to the adoption of new behaviors.

THINGS OUR BRAINS LIKE

- Social connection
- Delicious foods
- Exercise
- Achievement

DOPAMINE

FEEL GOOD



NEW THINGS

- New Procedures
- Technology Adoption
- Compliance

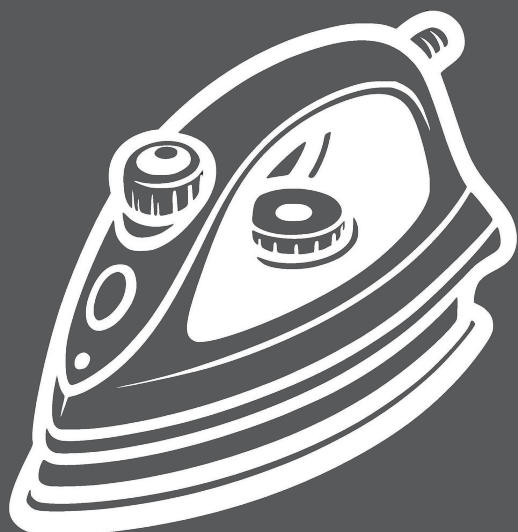
ADRENALINE | CORTISOL

STRESS

We estimate that about 90% of effort to change behavior is wasted.

- Lack of understanding of behavioral and neuroscience undermines our ability to create change – **for example, the role of time...**

Time is an important factor because it impacts the brain's ability to connect the behavior and impact



HOT!

Time to register in your brain

What would be more effective?

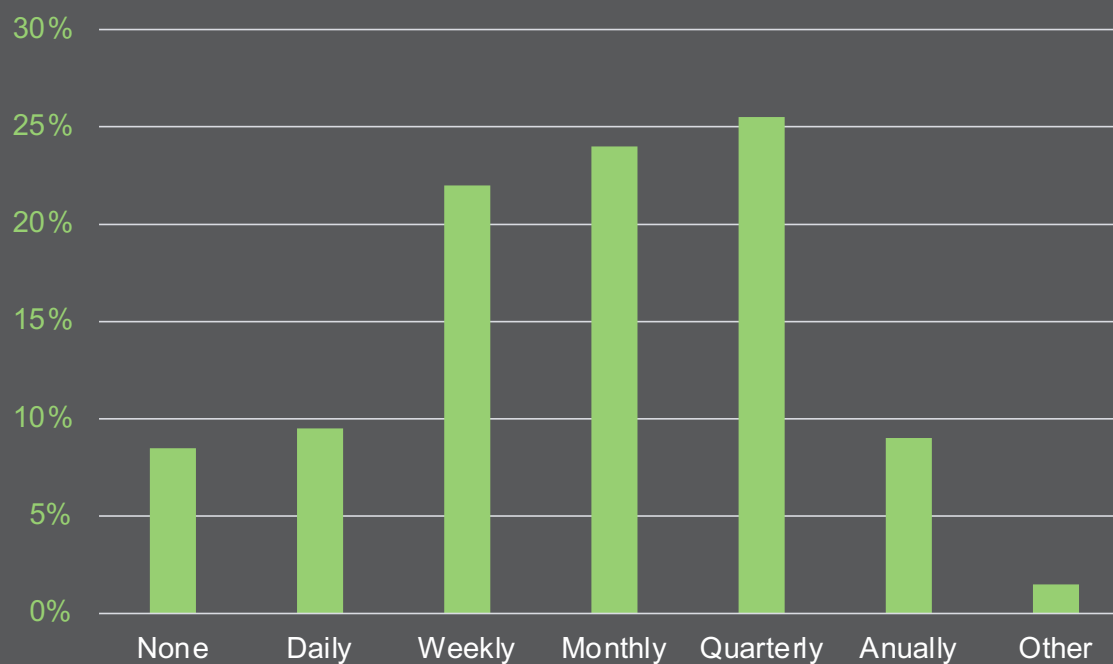
→ **Instant**

→ **One week**

How often do you recognize and/or reward safety?

- None
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Annually
- Other

Responses from 200 US construction workers



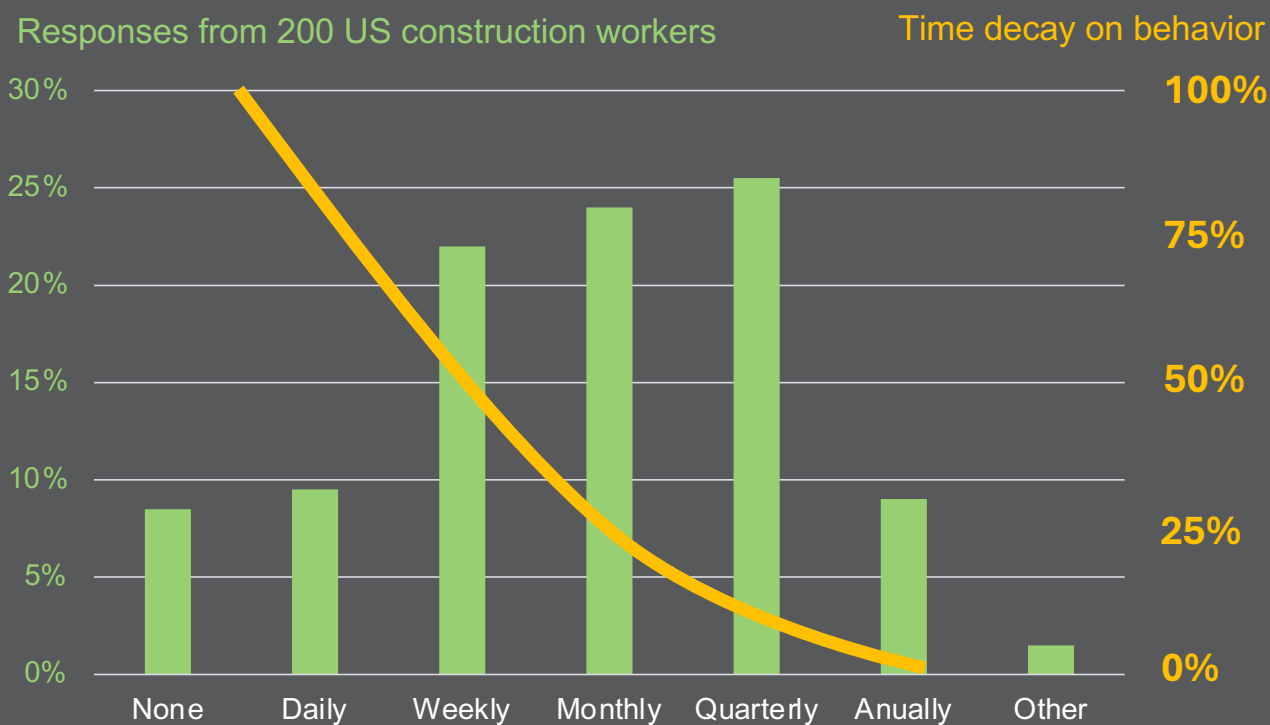
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Time erodes your brain's ability to connect the behavior and the reward.

- None
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Annually
- Other



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Now that we understand what we are up against, lets talk about **employee retention**

- What is the connection between safety and employee retention?
- What are the causes of employee turnover?
- As a safety leader, how can I impact retention?

Safe Environments Increase Retention.

- ✓ When people do feel safe and emotionally supported, they're about **half as likely to leave.** (Gallup)
- ✓ Workplaces with strong safety cultures see up to **48% lower turnover rates.** (NSC)
- ✓ Employees who feel safe are 42% more engaged at work. Highly engaged employees are **59% less likely to turnover.** (Gallup)

+50%
RETENTION
↑
SAFETY

Safe Workplaces significantly improve retention.
Unsafe Workplaces decrease Retention.

- High-injury workplaces experience 139% more turnover. (OSHA)

UNSAFE
↓
TURNOVER
+137%

The economic impact of reducing turnover is big

- The cost of a skilled employee is 6 months to 24 months of their annual salary. (Gallup)

- Lost productivity
- Increased stress on remaining team
- Recruitment and hiring process
- Onboarding and training

- 5,000-person company
- 30% annual turnover rate
- \$45,300 median comp

\$33,975,000

↓ **2%**

28% Annual Turnover

\$2,265,000

SAVINGS

It's clear safety impacts retention.
What about retention's impact on safety?

SAFETY  **RETENTION**

RETENTION  **SAFETY**

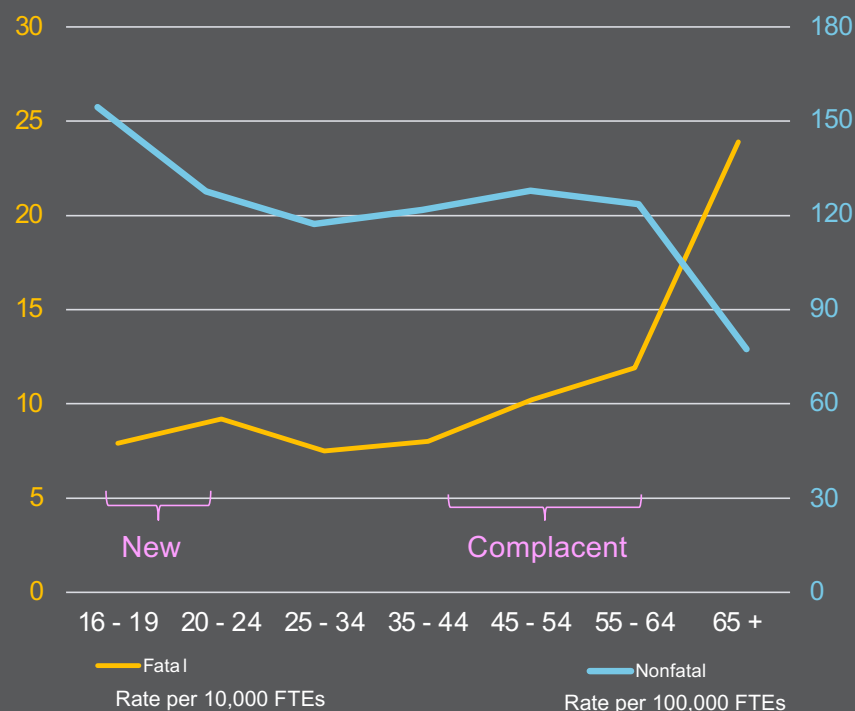
High turnover leads to inexperienced employees, increasing accident risks.

- Approximately 48% of injury claims in the construction industry come from workers during their **first year of employment** (OSHA)
- Retaining skilled workers means fewer training gaps and stronger safety habits.



New employees are at higher risk while middle age is challenged by complacency.

- New employees are 50% more likely to become injured
- A 55-year-old is 38% more likely to suffer a fatal accident than a 30-year-old.



CPWR | Center for construction research and training

You can't create a culture of **SAFETY** without **RETENTION**



Let's dig into this

The five most common reasons people give for leaving a company...

Why People Leave

- Low Pay
- Lack of Advancement
- Feeling disrespected at work
- Childcare challenges
- Limited flexible work options

NSC



There is a difference between why people start looking vs why they take another job.

Why People Leave

- Low Pay
- Lack of Advancement
- Feeling disrespected at work
- Childcare challenges
- Limited flexible work options

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Why People Stay

- Feeling valued (Managerial Support and Recognition)
- Opportunities for Career Growth
- Effective Communication and Clear Vision
- Work-Life Balance and Flexibility
- Employee Engagement and Empowerment

Harvard Business Review / The Guardian

Let's focus on the areas you can impact the most

Why People Leave

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NSC

Why People Stay

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Harvard Business Review / The Guardian

As a safety leader, you might have the most influential role on a job site or factory floor.

- Safety leaders typically interact frequently with everyone.
- Often serving as HR representative (unofficially).
- Often the place people bring their challenges and problems.
- 8x the impact on “sense of feeling valued” than a peer.
- People look to you to model behavior



As a safety leader, your “soft skills” might be more important than your technical experience.

Why People Leave

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NSC

Why People Stay

- **Feeling valued (Managerial Support and Recognition)**
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- Work-Life Balance and Flexibility
- **Employee Engagement and Empowerment**

Harvard Business Review / The Guardian

Some interesting data regarding the triggers for people to start looking...

Job-hunting activity jumps:

- 9% when starting a new role.
- 12% when lifetime milestones like turning 40 or 50
- 6% after a work anniversary
- 16% before a reunion.



CEB / Harvard Business Review



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- ✓ What is the connection between safety and employee retention?
- ✓ What are the causes of employee turnover?

As a safety leader, how can I impact retention?

As a safety leader how can I impact retention?

1. KEEP DOING WHAT YOU ARE DOING

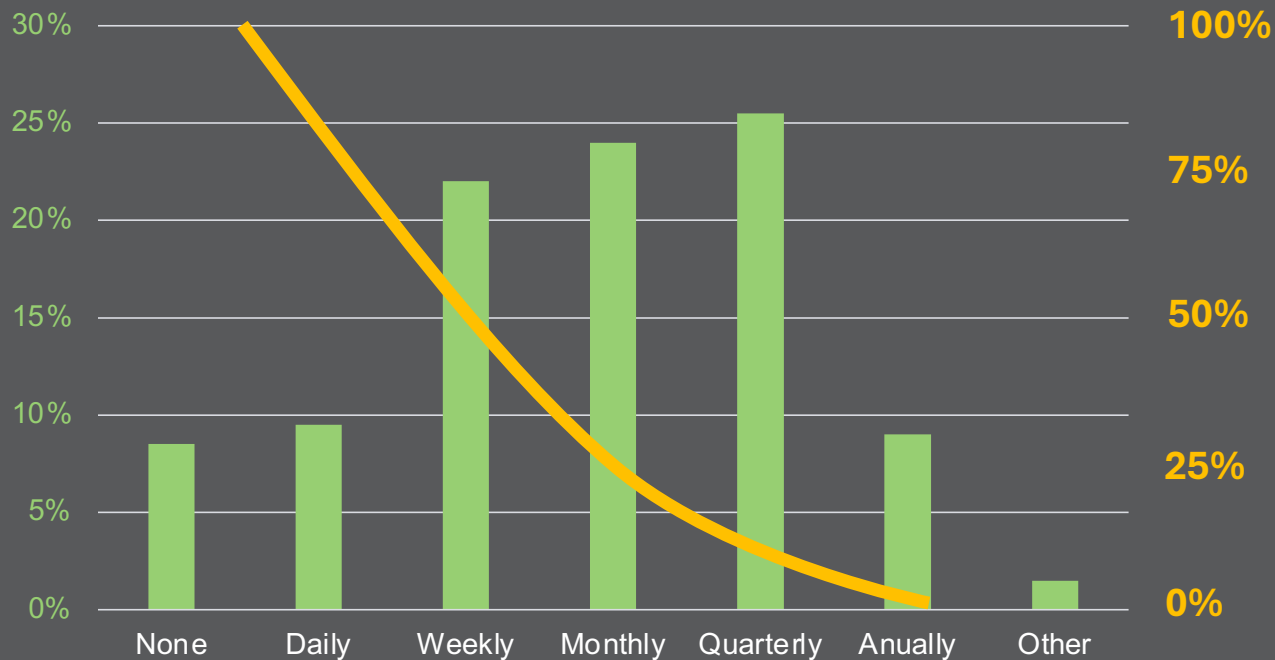
- Keeping environments safe!
- Listening and identifying problems
- Proactively making changes to keep people safe.
- Modeling behaviors

As a safety leader how can I impact retention?

2. IMPROVE YOUR RECOGNITION PROGRAM

Responses from 200 US construction workers

Time decay on behavior



90%

Of recognition
budgets are wasted

Key elements that make up effective recognition

Timeliness

A critical but often overlooked factor. Each day delay is a 5% reduction in behavioral impact.

Specific to a behavior

If I am recognized but the behavior (not just the outcome) is recognized, much harder to repeat.

Emotional effect

We are human, including how it impacts people increases the effect.

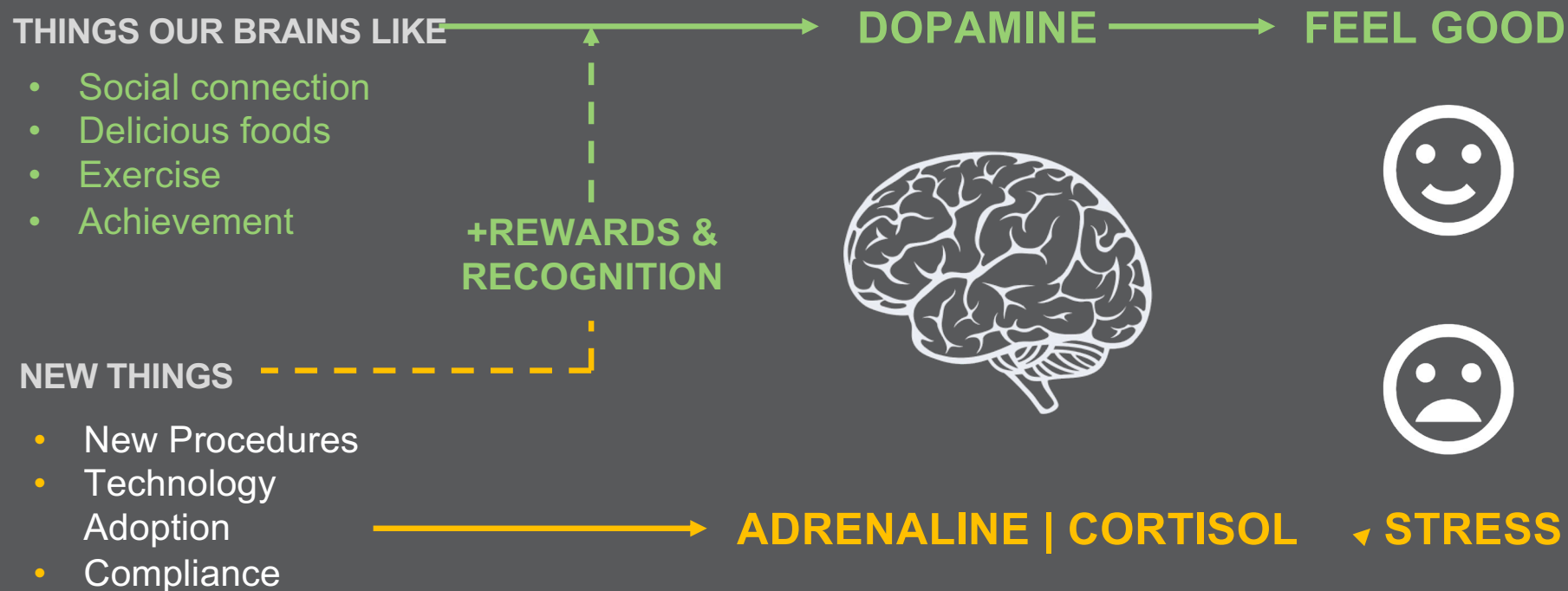
Result

Connecting the behavior to the outcome increases the understanding of how to mimic.

Frequency

Small frequent rewards or incentives are much more effective because they help habituate behavior.

Use rewards and incentives to reduce the resistance to change and “habituate” new behaviors.



Recognition and rewards might be the most powerful tool you have available...if you know how to use it!

- Recognition programs can increase retention by up to 31%. (Society of Human Resource Managers)
- Helps people feel valued and appreciated (#1 reason people stay)



As a safety leader how can I impact retention?

3. CREATE FEEDBACK LOOPS

- Seek out and collect information.
- Be proactive before a problem becomes an incident.
- Listen, act, communicate.

CASE STUDY: OPEN COMMUNICATION TRANSFORMS SAFETY AT LINEBACK AND ALCOA

Linbeck Construction

- Implemented a Behavior-Based Safety (BBS) program that encouraged peer-to-peer safety observations and active employee feedback.
- **Achieved a roughly 50% reduction in recordable incidents and injuries by enabling workers to identify hazards and suggest improvements.**
- Ensured widespread engagement through multilingual training and regular safety talks.
- Earned national recognition with awards such as the AGC Construction Safety Excellence Awards.

ALCOA

- Established an open-door safety communication policy under CEO Paul O'Neill, including providing his personal contact for safety concerns.
- Required immediate reporting, root-cause analysis, and corrective actions for every incident, fostering a proactive safety culture.
- **Reduced the lost-workday injury rate by approximately 93%, setting a benchmark for industrial safety.**
- Received numerous accolades, including the National Safety Council's awards and OSHA VPP Star status.

As a safety leader how can I impact retention?

4. IMPROVE YOUR ONBOARDING

- Define what you want to accomplish and how you want people to feel.
- First 90 days on a job are critical to retention and safety – your onboarding should be at least that long.

Case Study: Reducing turnover by 26% in 30 days.

SITUATION

\$600m manufacturer
1,200 employees

**100% annual
turnover rate**

Employee onboarding
More than administrative process

Manager recognition
Championing behaviors and
making people feel valued

↓ 26%

Reduction in
employee turnover

\$2,355,600
savings at 3 locations

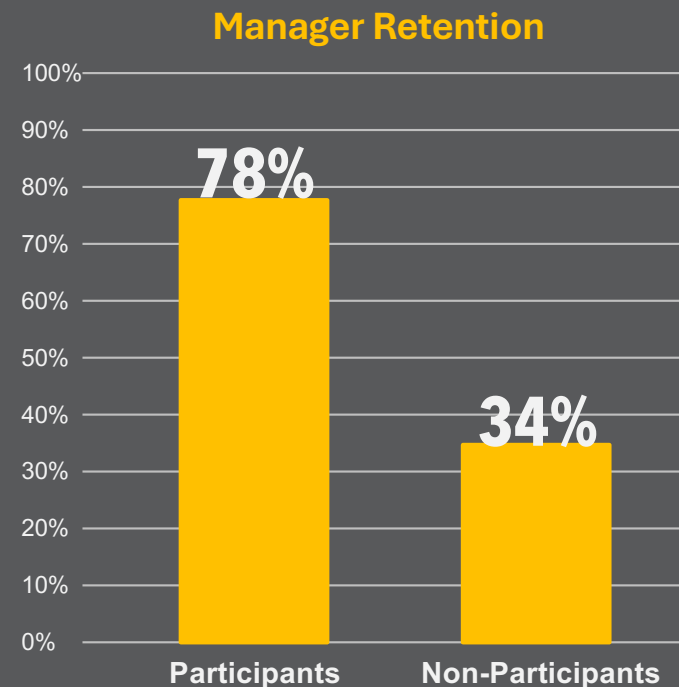
As a safety leader how can I impact retention?

5. PARTNER WITH HR TO CREATE CLEAR GROWTH PATHS AND INVEST IN SOFT SKILLS

- Soft skill development improves short, and long-term value of employee.
- Needed by any people leader
- Improves overall culture and quality of life.
- People feel valued when supported.

CASE STUDY – SPIRIT AIRLINES FRONT LINE MANAGER TRAINING

- Created leadership training program for Spirit Airlines to address the soft skills gap for first-time and front-line people leaders.
- 540 of an invited 950 people managers participated in the program.
- Participants are 2x more likely to stay at Spirit airlines.



These five things account for more than half your turnover risk.

1. Keep being a great safety leader
2. Improve your recognition program
3. Create feedback loops
4. Improve onboarding
5. Clarify growth path and invest in soft skills

50%

Retention Risk

50%

Safety Risk

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QUESTIONS?

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One last behavioral science nugget...

IKEA and Lego - two companies that leverage the same behavioral science concept



IKEA EFFECT: We place significantly more value in things we help create.

- Research shows that people would pay **63% more** for **furniture they helped construct** than identical furniture that came pre-assembled.



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