

Introduction

Organisations have to establish priorities in order to help them achieve their objectives. Health and safety is particularly important for an organisation that provides public transport. Any organisation that carries passengers must take responsibility for them. This case study shows how FirstGroup, the world's leading transport company, has developed a safety culture. This culture places customer and employee safety at the heart of its activities.

First has grown from a small bus company in Scotland to an organisation with a turnover of more than £6 billion. It operates mainly in the UK and North America. It employs around 136,000 staff and transports some 2.5 billion passengers a year. First is the UK's largest bus operator. It operates one in five of all local bus services. It is also the UK's largest rail operator. First operates four passenger rail franchises - First Capital Connect, First Great Western, First ScotRail and First TransPennine Express. It also operates First Hull Trains and freight services through First GBRf which transports loads as diverse as mail and coal throughout the UK. Within North America First has four divisions, including its yellow school bus operations and Greyhound, the famous inter-city bus service.

When an organisation transports as many people as First, it takes on a huge responsibility for the safety of these customers. It also has a responsibility for the safety of its employees and contractors. This is why safety and customer service are the core values for First. Values incorporate the beliefs and principles that steer the actions of a business.

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First constantly seeks to improve the safety culture within the business. It does this by applying a

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'If you cannot do it safely, don't do it.'

zero tolerance approach to unsafe practices. For example, First introduced a ban on using mobile phones, including hands-free, for any employee while driving on company business. By improving working practices and working conditions First aims to set and meet the highest possible safety standards for passengers and staff. Its ethos known as Injury Prevention is adhered to across all of First's operations. An Injury Prevention handbook is carried by all staff. In addition to this, Injury Prevention incorporates training, monitoring and reporting procedures for safety issues. It is designed to embed the safety culture into all areas of the business.

Health and safety legislation in the UK

There are a number of different pieces of legislation that govern health and safety in the UK. Some specifically govern working conditions and working with hazardous materials, for example, chemicals. These pieces of legislation provide legal requirements for employers to lay down standards of health and safety. These include for example:

- providing a written policy on health and safety and ensuring that this is communicated to all employees
- providing training on safety procedures or use of work equipment.

However, UK health and safety law is rooted in one particular piece of important legislation. This is the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. This Act outlines the duties which employers have towards employees and members of the public. It also identifies the responsibilities that employees have to themselves and each other.



Under the Health and Safety at Work Act, employers have to look at the risks in their workplace and take sensible measures to tackle them. At the same time employees also have to take reasonable care for their own health and safety at work. Employees must co-operate with their employers to ensure a safe working environment. They also have to make sure that the health and safety of others is not affected by their actions. At First, employees can use the safety contact pages in their Injury Prevention handbooks to record any identified safety issues. Issues might include hazardous conditions, unsafe ways of working, or a near miss. It also provides employees with the opportunity to suggest improvements in safety. The safety contact page is then used to report back to their manager.



The Secretary of State responsible for health and safety at work appoints the Health and Safety Commissioner (HSC) and the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) to make sure the Act is adhered to. The HSC and ORR ensure this through their enforcement bodies, Her Majesty's Railway Inspectorate (HMRI) and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The HSE and HMRI enforce the Act through a number of activities. These include unannounced inspections of workplaces, health and safety audits and the provision of advice. The HSE and the HMRI can order improvements to be made in workplaces and can bring about prosecutions if people are found to be in breach of the law. The HSE and the HMRI's job is to 'protect people against risks to health or safety arising out of work activities'.

Meeting the requirements of the Act includes employers like First influencing the behaviour of their employees through training, policies and guidance. For example, First has a zero tolerance policy on the use of mobile phones and hands-free devices whilst in charge of a vehicle not just limited to buses and trains, but also to personal vehicles being used for business purposes. Speed limits on company property, advanced driving courses, keeping working areas tidy and wearing protective clothing are just some of the many measures taken by the company. These help to protect the health and safety of its employees.

Health and safety - duties of an employer



Health and safety is one of the many responsibilities of an employer. Under the Health and Safety at Work Act the company and its managers can be held liable for injuries to employees and others. This means that individuals, as well as businesses, can be prosecuted for breaches of the law. Prosecution can result in unlimited fines or even in prison sentences.

'If you cannot do it safely, don't do it.' Since 2006 FirstGroup has used Injury Prevention as part of its approach to safety. Injury Prevention is a safety tool that the whole of First uses. It helps safety to become a way of life. The process provides training and development on, for example, safety planning and risk assessment. A related database stores reported data from Injury Prevention handbooks. This data is then used to identify

problem areas, required actions to combat these and further training needs, but it also helps to highlight areas of excellence. Where best practice is identified, this can be shared across the company.

Injury Prevention depends upon good leadership. Managers must have the knowledge, the power and the courage to ensure Injury Prevention principles are embraced by First's 136,000 employees. Managers are required to implement the Injury Prevention principles.

Injury Prevention training provides employees with the knowledge to behave in a safe way. Injury Prevention handbooks enable employees to understand the issues connected to safety and to be involved in improving safety for themselves, for their colleagues and their customers.



Employee and customer protection



Organisations have responsibilities to their stakeholders. For example, they have a duty to pay their employees an agreed wage and provide them with a written contract of employment. The Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 was introduced to require employers to consider making changes to their premises in order to improve access for disabled people. Good employers go beyond all of this legislation. First has a reputation for being a good employer. Part of the reason is First's relentless approach to safety.



Safety is a way of life within First. Disciplinary action can result from staff not adhering to safety procedures. Everyone at FirstGroup has a responsibility to contribute to creating a safe working environment. In the Injury Prevention handbook, there are a number of working principles designed to keep safety at the front of employees' minds. These principles include the need to:

Benefits of a safe working environment

The focus on safety has contributed to First becoming the leading transport operator in the UK and North America. First realises that its staff are its primary resource in ensuring the safety of its customers. There are a number of employee safety practices developed by FirstGroup:

- Mobiles and motoring do not mix company policy states that no employee or contractor on company business can make or take a call on a mobile phone while in charge of a vehicle. This is regardless of the hands-free option. Reaction times are on average 50% slower when using a mobile phone when driving.



- The speed limit in all depots and in every bus station is a maximum of 10 mph at all times because of the number of people likely to be moving around in this area. A slow speed reduces the risk of anyone being hurt. This applies to staff driving both company and their own vehicles.
- All vehicles must reverse park as evidence has proven there are fewer collisions.
- Use of high-visibility jackets on premises.
- Holding onto handrails when using stairs.
- Carrying Injury Prevention handbook at all times whilst on company business to provide an instant record of any safety related incidents.
- In addition to their standard training, bus drivers also complete a one-day Advanced Safe Driving course. This results in safer driving, less stress for drivers and a more comfortable ride for passengers.
- First's buses and trains are fitted with CCTV and safety notices for passengers.
- First uses training simulators for bus drivers and train drivers. The state-of-the-art simulators can offer a number of scenarios for the drivers, for example, snow, flooding, objects hitting the windscreen and even animals on a railway line.

Each year First hosts internal health and safety conferences in the UK and North America. Annual figures are discussed and plans are set for the following year. Every month Executive Safety Committee meetings are held and representatives from across the business are required to attend and review safety programmes.

Regular Injury Prevention Tours are carried out by directors and other members of staff. These help to assess safety levels across the business. The intranet and internal company newsletter carry up-to-date information on safety themes. Staff are encouraged to talk about health and safety issues with their line managers at any time. When new staff are employed, they are given a safety briefing within their first week of employment. At this time they are issued with their Injury Prevention handbook.

First also collaborates with other organisations to ensure the safety of its customers. For example, in Aberdeen the organisation is working with the local authority to identify potentially hazardous stretches on their bus routes. Plans can be made to prevent accidents in these areas.



First's focus on safety has enabled it to win the European Road Safety Excellence Award from the European Union and the Green Cross for Safety Medal from the National Safety Council in North America. There are also internal awards within the organisation. Every company nominates a person or a team that has demonstrated outstanding safety practice. The winner receives a financial donation for the charity of their choice. For example, in 2009 First ScotRail and the bus company First in Devon and Cornwall each received First's top safety award. This was in recognition of their exceptional approach towards safety management. These awards not only reward those individuals and companies that have delivered outstanding safety performance, but also give everyone encouragement to improve their own performance.

Conclusion

Organisations are responsible for the health and safety of its employees and customers. For transport operators such as First, health and safety has become a core value.

By keeping and analysing records, First continues to improve its safety policies, going beyond the requirements of legislation. It has identified best practices which are shared with the employees across the company. This enables FirstGroup to take a lead in the industry in which it operates.

