

Leadership and worker involvement toolkit

Getting the workforce engaged in health and safety (H&S) at Bateman Groundwork's Ltd



Key successes:

- With the creation of senior manager posts, responsibility for H&S is now shared between head office and sites.
- Worker involvement in H&S discussions has resulted in solutions that work in practice and save money in the long run.
- Communication has improved across the business. Observations get shared so that everyone is learning from each other.
- Senior managers have become more confident in running interactive briefings with workers to engage them in H&S.

Who is Bateman Groundworks Ltd?

- Established in 1997, the company's core business is ground works on house building sites for clients such as Bovis Homes, Taylor Wimpey & Persimmon Homes.
- The company employs a total of 128 staff (15 office staff, 7 site managers and 110 direct onsite operatives), with an additional 10-15 subcontractors per day.
- The company also employs an external H&S advisor (Foley & Baugh Associates) The company implemented the OSHAS18001 in September 2013.

Why Bateman Groundwork's used the Leadership and Worker Involvement Toolkit (LWIT)

Senior management at Bateman Groundwork's is committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of its employees, consistent with its philosophy: *"To provide a service that meets client's needs, technically and financially, while ensuring quality and safety."*

The company underwent substantial change in the 18 months prior to using the LWIT. A new 'site management' tier was introduced to cover the managerial/administrative side of H&S. It was a significant investment for the company to select and equip these newly appointed site managers, some promoted from site foremen, with the necessary managerial and H&S competencies to effectively carry out this role. This shift in responsibility for H&S from head office to site initiated a new way of working. Workers were given more responsibility for making H&S decisions, supported by the necessary systems/procedures and light touch supervision from senior management. The company is keen to continue to develop a collaborative culture in which everyone in the business takes responsibility for H&S, moving away from the "them and us" attitudes of the past. It used the LWIT to identify any gaps in its current leadership and worker involvement practices, as well as any additional practices it could adopt and standardise. Specifically the company aimed to:

- Improve worker engagement in H&S issues and;
- Develop good H&S communication skills across the workforce.

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Which parts of the LWIT did Bateman Groundworks find most helpful and why?

■ Step 2 - The Health and Safety Diagnostic Tool (HSDT)

Senior management completed the HSDT at the outset of the research (April 2013) to understand how well developed was Bateman Groundworks overall approach to H&S. Results showed that H&S is considered to have an equal priority to productivity. The company's "Time Out" policy (implemented through OSHAS18001) requires workers to stop work in situations where they feel unsafe. The company has also established formal learning mechanisms (mostly through in-house and external training) to learn from experiences (e.g. accidents, incidents, near misses) and educate its workforce about risks and controls. Nevertheless, results also showed that management was more committed to H&S than workers. Senior management recognised the need to afford the workforce with greater autonomy for H&S decisions.

The company's H&S advisor incorporated the HSDT's scale ('Sprinting', 'Running', 'Walking', 'Starting Blocks', 'Getting Going') into a 'H&S Measurement Tool' developed by the company to assess the performance of site managers after being in post for a year. The scale has also been applied to production and commercial assessments to promote consistency in measurement. "Doing this has helped not just H&S but it [has] moved through the company as well... production, administration, commercial, etc." (Foley & Baugh Associates, October 2014).

■ Steps 3 to 6 – Communication, worker involvement and situational awareness advice

Senior management looked through the LWIT to compare the company's current leadership and worker involvement (LWI) practices with good practice. While the company had an established H&S management system in place, with the introduction of the OSHAS18001 system on sites, some gaps were identified, namely to:

- Improve communication of H&S on site and between site and head office. This includes up skilling senior managers in worker engagement techniques to deliver the company's programme of circa 30 toolbox talks in an engaging way.
- Establish additional mechanisms for workers to voice H&S concerns/ideas.

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How did the company improve communication and worker engagement on H&S matters?

Bateman Groundworks implemented a number of focussed initiatives to establish effective two-way H&S communication across the business and to provide mechanisms for workers to voice H&S concerns and suggestions to management. These initiatives included:

(1) Re-invigorating the company's H&S Committee:

The company re-established its H&S Committee, which is chaired by the managing director, and consists of representative site managers, foremen and workers from every trade. The committee meets every two months to discuss H&S matters under review. Two members of the committee are replaced every three years to ensure continuity while encouraging wider involvement. The committee provides a means for early worker involvement, increasing the likelihood that solutions will work in practice. For example, during discussions about how best to fit hand rails onto machines to prevent falls from height during maintenance, a machine driver pointed out a potential issue with the planned placement of the rails and suggested a workable alternative. *“He is the one who works nine hours in that machine per day, so he is obviously the best person to consult [about] issues before we implement anything across the company”* (Lewis Nicholas, Bateman Groundworks Ltd. October 2014).

(2) A “Bright Idea/Bad Idea” suggestion scheme:

Each site now has a suggestion box with ‘Bright Idea’ and ‘Bad Idea’ cards that workers can complete anonymously to express their thoughts on how the company could improve and/or what it should not be doing. All suggestion boxes are locked and can only be accessed by the H&S advisor. Site managers were involved in producing the procedure for the scheme, which served as an aide memoire to ensure a consistent roll out to workers during the weekly toolbox talks. All cards are collected each month by the H&S advisor. Workers receive feedback about whether their idea will be pursued or not. Ideas that save the business money are rewarded. *“Whenever someone has written their name, they will get a letter from [the managing director]... thanking them for taking the time... to express their views through the system”* (Foley & Baugh Associates, October 2014).



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“Bright Idea/Bad Idea” suggestion scheme at Bateman Groundworks

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(3) Developing site managers' worker engagement skills:

While site managers had received the necessary accredited H&S training and had attended a five-day in-house management training programme, they needed support to help them to engage their workers in H&S discussions about method statements and risk assessments. A staff survey revealed that site managers were *"giving [workers toolbox talks]... saying 'read and sign that, are there any questions?'... That's not interactive enough for us"* (Foley & Baugh Associates, January 2014). Support was provided by:

- Enabling sites with Wi-Fi to access the Internet during toolbox talks, e.g. referring to the picture-based scenarios in Step 3.
- Training site managers to act as champions for specific topics, e.g. asbestos, manual handling. The accredited training provided further tips on ways to engage workers.
- Involving site managers in the design and delivery of interactive workshops at the company away day (March 2014). This runs every two years to refresh worker knowledge in eight key H&S risk areas relevant to the business. Being actively involved improved site managers' ability and confidence in delivering interactive and engaging talks.



Produced with permission from Bateman Groundworks Ltd.
Get the thumbs up before you approach logo ("Thumbs Up" scheme)

(4) A "Thumbs Up" scheme:

The "Thumbs Up" scheme was taken from Taylor Wimpey EA sites to improve worker awareness of what is going on around them on every Bateman Groundwork's site. *"If you see the machine carrying out a heavy lifting operation... you need to get the drivers attention first... actually put your thumb up so he can then see that you're there and acknowledges you, this will ensure should you walk around the back of the machine this is with the drivers consent... it's keeping everyone aware on site... with only approved personnel working in that area"* (Lewis Nicholas, Bateman Groundworks Ltd. October 2014). To prompt this behaviour, each plant/machinery on site has "Thumbs Up" stickers on them. The same logo has also been printed on high-vis jackets and vests for all site workers and visitors (see above). The initiative was well received by workers across all sites. The roll-out of the scheme was timely as workers had heard about someone in a nearby company being run over and killed by a reversing forklift

How did the LWIT help Bateman Groundworks to improve communication and worker engagement on H&S matters?

■ Putting systems in place to promote two-way communication across the business

Together with the company's existing H&S management practices, established with the introduction of OSHAS18001, the additional LWI initiatives were perceived by senior management as being instrumental in developing a two-way communication for H&S across the business. The company now has systems and procedures in place to get workers' views on H&S issues as soon as they arise. Any H&S suggestions discussed at the H&S Committee and monthly meeting between all site managers is funnelled to an 'Internal Management Meeting' each week where decisions are signed off by the managing director. These outcomes are communicated to workers through site managers, H&S Committee minutes, a note in pay packs or site notice boards. Systems are also in place for site managers to provide timely feedback to head office, e.g. completing a 'Site Manager Report' to alert senior management of any site issues (e.g. safety equipment not arriving on time causing work delays). "This is important for the [site] managers because they [have] got to be accountable, but they [have] got to have the opportunity to state their case" (Foley & Baugh Associates, October, 2014).

■ Improving the delivery of training, toolbox talks and briefings to engage workers

The training and support that site managers have received in worker engagement skills (e.g. through formal training programmes, involvement in the away day and access to the LWIT) have encouraged them to approach workers differently so that they are more likely to take on board H&S advice. Site managers feel more confident than they did at the start of the research in delivering interactive toolbox talks and briefing sessions to workers. "We used the [site] manager's meetings prior to the away day to begin to outline the [sessions] and each had a lesson plan... presentational aids, etc... the guys were involved in that to enhance their ability to do training sessions" (Foley & Baugh Associates, October 2014).

■ Encouraging more widespread worker involvement in H&S matters

As advocated through the LWIT, a site manager and foreman considered that effective conversations with workers built through established good relationships offered the best route to engagement. Workers are now approaching site managers/foremen to voice H&S concerns rather than ignoring or keeping quiet about these, and are completing "Bright Idea/Bad Idea" cards (e.g., a recent issue raised about the safe storage of keys for vehicles and immobilisers). Workers are also more likely to use their own initiative, such as putting up appropriate H&S signage rather than having to be told to do so, and follow the "Thumbs Up" and "Time Out" procedures on site. Senior management actively encourage worker involvement, for example, by asking workers to trial PPE or test road machines and make a recommendation on which to purchase. One wheel digger operator posted a picture of himself with his new machine on a social media site and thanked the managing director for purchasing the model that he and his workmates had suggested.

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■ Being owned at site level, H&S is now widely recognised as a core company value

The company has observed an improvement in its H&S culture and believe that this reflects its progress with up-skilling site managers. Completing the HSDT again (October, 2014) showed a shift in the commitment and engagement levels of the workforce. The results showed that workers now share managers' commitment and are proactive in raising H&S standards. Site managers have been instrumental in: involving workers in discussions about risks, developing a culture of weekly safety briefings, promoting "Thumbs Up" and "Time Out", measuring progress through site observations and encouraging two-way communication on H&S matters between management and workers. Senior management noted the improved confidence of site managers in taking responsibility for the H&S of their own sites. For example, one site manager developed a H&S questionnaire to quiz workers on key learning points after toolbox talks. The questionnaire is also used in inductions to teach new starters about safety rules.



■ What challenges did Bateman Groundworks encounter along the way?

Only minor challenges arose when implementing the additional LWI initiatives. Senior management considered this to be a by-product of the company's new way of working with workers consulted about initiatives at an early stage. As such, any issues can be quickly resolved and a way forward agreed. For example, senior management became aware when talking with workers that they were reluctant to submit 'Bright Idea/Bad Idea' cards about their site manager as the suggestion boxes were initially located in the site manager's office. This also meant that the boxes were not accessible when the office was locked. To resolve this issue, all boxes were moved to a communal place (e.g. canteens), accessible to everyone at all times.

"Some operatives have said that they want to raise an issue, but the issue may well be with the site manager... so this is a confidential route that [only the H&S advisor] will see..."

(Lewis Nicholas, Bateman Groundwork's Ltd. October 2014).

An on-going challenge that the company is addressing concerns the confidence of site managers to state their case to senior management to secure funding or change a work practice although a general improvement has been noted; "

Some of the site managers still suffer from lack of confidence... they will say something to me... and I say... 'Why haven't you told [the managing director] about that?'... [their] job is to state the case... they are slowly coming round to that"

(Foley & Baugh, October 2014).

How has the use of the LWIT benefited the business?

“Accident rates are down, but more importantly more risk assessments are reviewed, more near misses are reported, more staff suggestions [are made and we have]... better skilled site managers and foremen”

(Foley & Baugh Associates, September 2014).

■ Improved reputation

Senior management stated that the company has grown financially over the past couple of years and commented that the company is held in high esteem by clients who have confidence that Batemans Groundwork's will deliver quality work without compromising H&S. The managing director of a principal client praised Bateman Groundwork's for the step change that it has made with H&S management by creating site managers.

■ Improved efficiency

“The whole methodology of the company is different and is making for a better, more straightforward life for us all” (Foley & Baugh Associates, October 2014).

The creation of site managers was believed to have created efficiencies within the organisation (e.g. materials coming onto sites just in time). One site manager commented on positive worker feedback about the new systems in place and acknowledgement that it is helping them with their day jobs.

■ A more motivated workforce

Workers that had previously left the company to work elsewhere for a slight increase in pay have now returned to the business after experiencing lower H&S standards. Senior management considered the following as being important for boosting worker morale:

- Involving workers in purchasing decisions. “You start the guys off with the right attitude and they feel like they are part of the company” (Foley & Baugh Associates, October 2014).
- Promoting site managers from within the company (from site foremen) as they have already established a trusted relationship with their workers.
- Acknowledgement from the managing director for their valuable contributions to improve the business, and unexpected rewards – e.g. workers drawn out of a raffle at the away day chose an envelope containing anywhere between £5 and £300. However, “the biggest thing... is not the money, it's the recognition from [the managing director]... the fact that they... shook [his] hand and he said to them, thank you for all your hard work this year” (Foley & Baugh Associates, October 2014).

■ Improved communication across all areas of the business

“The company is willing to act as one and going forward further procedures will be implemented so each person is aware of the decisions that are made and what's happening on site [each] week”

(Lewis Nicholas, Bateman Groundwork's Ltd. October 2014).

The changes that the company have made have helped to improve communication generally. In particular, the ‘Site Managers Report’ was perceived by senior management as being invaluable for bridging the communication gaps between each site and head office for the core business areas (H&S, Production and Commercial). Management has learned that, “communication is essential throughout our organisation; documenting progress within our weekly reports acts as an excellent aide memoire for our site team... whilst also providing Senior Management with a summary on works carried out that week....

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How does Bateman Groundwork's plan to keep up these high standards?

"We are determined to take the best practice from every client we have... and build a system that is above everybody's, so that we are always compliant with their standards and always miles ahead of where the law wants us to be"
 (Foley & Baugh Associates, October 2014).

■ Further development of LWI initiatives

The company is developing a Bateman's character to personalise "Time Out" and "Thumbs Up" signs so that these schemes continue to attract attention across sites. Site names are also being added to "Bright Idea/Bad Idea" cards to encourage site managers to take ownership of the changes that need to be made to their site. The company is also developing proactive measures of worker engagement, initially to measure site manager's level of engagement through a 'Site Audit Checklist' that captures, e.g. how many suggestion cards have been completed on their site.

■ Provide sites with instant feedback on how they are inputting into the business

The company's aspiration is to give sites full profit and loss responsibility. It is considering doing this via an Excel spreadsheet (having trained site managers to use Excel). Site managers would input work completed each week with the associated costs and value. Their objective is to break even, so that the company is making the profit that it needs to make.

"They will see then what [they] have done as site managers, the decisions [they] have taken and how that has affected the work" (Foley & Baugh Associates, October 2014).

A final word from the Production Department and the H&S advisor...

"Eighteen months down the line you can see just how much we've implemented from this system and how it has benefited Bateman Groundworks as a company"
 (Lewis Nicholas, Bateman Groundwork's Ltd. October 2014).

"I can honestly say this with my hand on my heart... it's been fantastic... it's been wonderfully well received... and it's gone really, really well" (Foley & Baugh Associates, October 2014).

A final word from the Managing Director of Bateman Groundwork's, Richard Bateman...

"I am very pleased to have been a part of this study, not only have I seen improvement in our Health and Safety performance, but feel that we have played a small part in helping others to do the same"
 (Richard Bateman, Managing Director. October 2014).

The Leadership and Worker Involvement toolkit is aimed particularly at small and medium sized businesses and is designed to help improve your health and safety and bring additional benefits to your business and productivity. Developed by the construction industry's Leadership and Worker Engagement Forum, Hosted by HSE 04/12