

RISK ASSESSMENTS how to and not be petrified.

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Intro: HI, my name is Charles Buckton. I am the H&S officer for Stylo plc, we currently trade out of circa 650 stores under the Barratts and Priceless brands, employing 5600 personnel. Today I have been asked to give a talk about my perspective on actually creating and introducing risk assessments from scratch based on a team approach.

During this time, I will try and answer some questions that some if not most of you are probably thinking.

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No one ever chooses their career, the career chooses them.

I started with stylo 12 years ago as a warehouse operative so I spent a few years getting dirty and didn't just jump straight into H&S straight away.

One of my first jobs that I was given to do was to assess and write all of the risk assessments for the Head Office warehouse, of which there are now 64 combined assessments.

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In true form I am going to answer the first question last.

What happens if it all goes wrong?

Because I had never done a risk assessment before I was absolutely petrified. I had been asked to write something from scratch that if done wrong could cause serious harm to someone (and I am talking serious injury or loss of life and not just cuts and bruises) if I got it wrong. But then, if I got it right, the assessment could also help reduce the number of accidents that could have occurred by the introduction of a clear and simple instruction that originated from the risk assessment that I wrote.

Can I use someone else's format for writing the risk assessment?

I started off by using someone else's risk assessment format and knowledge because I didn't have a clue where/how to start, but can safely say now that I can create my own. But if it had not been for that initial push in the right direction by my mentor, I would not still be in H&S and would not be here right now.

Don't get me wrong; it's not as simple as writing the assessments, sending a copy to all of your locations and expecting everyone to adhere to the control measure (safe guards) that you have been put in place. You must, above everything else speak with your employees. Without this initial consultation your risk assessments are useless and have just been created by someone who realistically sits behind a desk or in an office and has never even seen the job/task being completed.

What would happen then is that your staff would receive the assessments, look at what you have written and go “that’s not right, I don’t do that, that’s wrong” at which point you may as well wave goodbye to all of your hard work, as you will not be able to obtain the buy in required.

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CONSULT CONSULT CONSULT and CONSULT again.

Your staff do the job/task that you want to assess, it therefore makes perfect sense to ask their advice, they will tell you warts and all, exactly what the hazards are and may even tell you how not to get injured.

? How In
Depth

Before you start, you do need to make a confirmed decision about how in-depth you need to actually go. Most risk assessments are simple and can be written (with consultation of course) in about 30 minutes, some however may take longer, and that all depends on what you decided upon next.

For instance?

You’re just about to open a new store/location and you are trying to decide on what type of floor covering to have put down. I can see your all asking in your heads “Charlie, how does this have an impact on my risk assessments”

Well, you decide to put down what you think is an adequate floor covering, but this then is going to be cleaned every day. As it gets cleaned it becomes slippery, but there is no risk assessment for house keeping or cleaning the floor, as you thought that this would not be an issue, and as it is slippery this then results in an increase in your accident ratings and statistics and ultimately a potential increase in personal injury claims. Before you know it the new store/location has already made a loss and has now become a millstone around your neck.

Or your decision could be made easier making the decision to have a risk assessment for general housekeeping and ensuring that the floor will not become a cause for concern when it is cleaned. Your risk assessment needs to also include the use of wet floor signs and a schedule for housekeeping that involves all cleaning to be done outside normal business hours, therefore reducing your accident rates and ultimately your court and insurance costs for potential liability claims.

This then takes me onto my next point and 2 areas that (in my mind) are always linked together, these are Hazards and Control Measures (safe guards).

The best way to simplify this would be the following:

If Jo (one of your employees) has been asked to use the goods lift to bring in some roll cages full of stock into the stock room, then there are a number of things that could happen to him.

1. He could cut himself quite badly if the roll cage is damaged
2. He could electrocute himself on the faulty wiring of the goods lift
3. The roll cage could fall on top of him if it has been overloaded with heavier items placed at the top, thus crushing his chest and ultimately killing him.

Always think of the worst-case scenario, not a pleasant thought but it is better to be prepared.

The control measures (safeguards/precautions) will tell Jo that he

1. Must inspect the roll cages for damage, therefore removing the possibility of him severely cutting himself from the damaged section.
2. As an employer you must service and test the lift on a regular basis, but this would be written down as a control measure

And as he inspected the roll cage

3. He also notices that there are a number of heavier items located at the top, therefore turning on that little light bulb in his head telling him that this has been stacked incorrectly and does not meet current company guidelines, which tells him not to move it and report the issue to his supervisor.

So you can see how hazards can be removed by the introduction of a control measure and therefore making the task that little bit safer for Jo to work, providing a safe and healthy working environment.

So how to put something like this into practice.

What I have done for the stores I look after, is firstly write down what jobs/tasks are done in every single location, then speak to a cross section of differing store types (shopping centre, high street stores etc) to find out how they safe guard themselves from injury or complete the task in safety whilst also considering what information, training etc the company would give them.

With all this knowledge, I can then go back and begin to write what we call a generic risk assessment. Now it may be that some of your stores have additional things that they have to do to ensure that they are not injured or injure someone else. You can add a section that allows them to do these things when they receive their risk assessments, this we call Additional Control measures. This will then be signed off by the receiving manager and dated. This date will become important later on.

? What if I miss something

What if I don't capture all of the risks on my initial investigation and the risk assessments are sent out?

At the end of the day, we are all human and are all-fallible enough to miss things from time to time. Sometimes a store employee may even tell you that you have missed something. They should then be congratulated for highlighting the risk and safeguarding fellow employees from potential injury.

To help with this kind of situation, you can add blank assessment sheets for the store/Area manager to complete. An example of this would be that 1 of your stores has an escalator and you did not include this, as it is only 1 store.

With guidance they can do their own risk assessment installing their own control measures so long as they send a copy to yourselves so you can confirm you are happy with the content.

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I Still feel unsure about what I have written or am about to write?

If you still unsure about whether or not you have covered everything that would have an impact on your staff/customers, speak to your Local Authority, they are there to help you and not hinder you. They are a fountain of information and knowledge and should be used.

Does everyone feel the same as me?

If you still feel a bit wary, get contact details from some of the companies that are in this room today and talk to each other. I bet you will find at least one other company in this room right now that has or will be going through the exact same problems that you are.

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We are all in retail and should be able to help each other come to the same conclusions and ultimately not have to re-invent the wheel so to speak.

Don't forget, any risk assessments that you create will need to be reviewed on a year-by-year basis and signed off to state this.

One last thing, I know that I have been talking about people losing limbs and lives etc, risk assessment aren't scary. If after you have written them the job still seems unsafe speak to your employees and your managers, it may be that they haven't given you all the information. If that still does not rectify the issue, speak to your Lead Authority and get external advice.

My mission statement is

"If everyone goes home safe, alive and uninjured, then I have done my job"

Hopefully I have set your mind at rest and you should now feel a bit more positive about actually doing your risk assessments. If you still need further assistance or guidance, go to the HSE website and or speak to your LAP.

This brings me to the very first question that hopefully some of you will ask.

Where do I
start?

This depends on you? Some people tend to start at their site or location entrance. Some people start with the most dangerous jobs first, as these may require more investment and time. But ultimately this all depends on you and the choice is yours.