



OSH Heads-Up

UI HealthWorks and WORKSAFE IOWA

First There Was That Hanging Cat...

...and since those days when we were told to “hang in there,” the number and variety of motivational posters have grown until they now seem to be everywhere, with their messages that urge us to climb higher, reach farther, and never give up.

Ken Brown, a University of Iowa professor in the Tippie College of Business, has determined that while some workers may be inspired by them to be more productive or safety-conscious, others may react negatively.

In regard to safety, Ken explains that a poster, “which is by nature impersonal,” may be interpreted as “management paying lip service to safety rather than taking time to build a workplace safety climate.” The obvious next question: If a poster doesn’t work, what does?

According to Ken, research in the area of industrial psychology has identified ways both managers and supervisors affect employee perceptions of safety (Thompson et al, 1998). And they play different roles: managers for example establishing priorities and controlling incentives, while supervisors monitor employee behavior and provide feedback.

Ken does not rule out the value of posters entirely. He can see them as part of a “multipronged strategy for change” which should come from a shared sense that change is needed.

For more information:

“Break room posters: Motivational or mockable? UI business professor says big picture more important” - [newsletter article](#)

“Where the Safety Rubber Meets the Shop Floor: A Confirmation Model of Management Influence on Workplace Safety” (Thompson et al, Journal of Safety Research, Vol 29, No. 1, Pages: 15-24, Published Spr 1998) - [abstract](#)