

A fundamental part of your role as a Safety rep is to represent the interests of your members and this requires involving them at every step of the process. This guide has been designed to help with both gaining the involvement of members and to ensure that the end result is one that they can all agree on.

Involving Members - 6 Step Problem Solving/Goal Achievement Approach

IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM/GOAL

LIST POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

PROs and CONs OF POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

CHOOSE THE 'BEST' POSSIBLE SOLUTION

DEVELOP A PLAN OF ACTION AND IMPLEMENT THE SOLUTION

EVALUATE AND REVIEW

Identifying the problem/goal

At times, it can be difficult to identify what *exactly* it is you want to change. Members may often have different aspirations or ideas as to how to approach situations.

It is important to outline at the start that you will be seeking consensus and this generally has three elements;

1. I agree
2. I don't fully agree but I can live with and support the agreement
3. I don't agree and I can't live with or support the agreement

Agreement of all the membership would be the ideal but it is possible to proceed with some dissenters providing they continue to offer their support.

Where members are not able to support a way forward it may be indicative of other problems that could be the subject of this approach.

It may be important to analyse the problem/goal by collecting relevant information. Why does this problem occur? Often people become focussed on the symptoms of the problem rather than the cause. Determining the cause means it is more likely that a workable solution will be found. What benefits are accrued by achieving this goal? Employers are more likely to be swayed by aspirations that provide benefits to them. It will be important later on to be able to demonstrate to employers that they will see real gains by supporting your goals.

Generating potential solutions

It should be emphasised to the group that there are no right or wrong solutions at this point. Even the apparently bizarre should be considered.

Potential solutions may end up being used individually or it may be that a combination of solutions may be used. Additionally, it may be that if a chosen solution is not successful then there may be alternative solutions that can be used.

Pros and Cons

At this stage, members need to spend some time considering each of the potential solutions. As well as determining the relative merits of each solution this stage also helps to identify the possible barriers that the employer might use for each of the potential solutions.

Some suggestions might be eliminated very quickly, others may require detailed discussion before elimination. Usually there will be two or three solutions that members will be able to choose from.

Choosing the 'best' solution

The best solution may not be the most attractive. The members have to consider the resources they have to work with as well as other circumstances. Issues such as finances, time, existing policies/procedures and physical resources may impede achieving the 'best' solution.

The 'best' solution should be reached by consensus while other back up solutions should also be identified in case the preferred solution proves to be unsuccessful. It may also be the case that a combination of a number of solutions is used.

Plan of action and implementing the solution

Having determined a solution, the next step is to implement it. With luck, members will now be energised by the whole process and will be fighting amongst themselves to help implement it.

This is the stage where it is decided who will do what, how they will do it and when they will do it. Different parts of implementing the solution may require different skills. Taking it to the employer may be the role of the rep but it may be helpful to include members in any meetings to continue the transparency of the process. Collecting and collating evidence that will support negotiations may be shared between members. Communicating the outcome of the process could be via members who have contributed to the process particularly where members have represented a number of different groups.

Plans should include timescales (which can be flexible) and methods of reporting back progress.

Review/Evaluation

Review and evaluation should be a continuous process but there will come a time when it is time to take stock of the situation. If it is clear that you have run into a dead end it may be time to go back to your other potential solutions. If you have encountered new and unforeseen problems then you might wish to consider problem solving them in order to move forward.

And most important.....

This approach should encourage those participating not to become despondent at the first obstacle and often there will be more than one potential solution which means that if one solution falls another could be used instead.