



Announcer:

It's time for the *IHSA Safety Podcast*.

Enzo Garritano:

Welcome to this podcast series on supervisors. I'm Enzo Garritano, President and CEO of IHSA. In this episode, we are joined by Ken Rayner, Vice President of Customer Relations, Market Development, and Labour Relations here at IHSA. Joining Ken will be Jody Young, Assistant Deputy Minister who oversees the Fair, Safe, and Healthy Workplaces Division of the Ministry of Labour, Training, and Skills Development, to discuss supervisor competencies.

Ken Rayner:

Thanks, Enzo. Jody Young, welcome to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*. To start, Jody, please share with our listeners what your role and responsibilities are at the Ministry of Labour, Training, and Skills Development.

Jody Young:

Thanks, Ken. As mentioned, I'm the ADM for Fair, Safe, and Healthy Workplaces Division at the Ministry of Labour, Training, and Skills Development, and I lead an extraordinary team of approximately 1,100 staff across the province responsible for compliance and enforcement of either occupational health and safety or employment standards, acts, and regulations in all provincially regulated workplaces within the province of Ontario.

Ken Rayner:

Jody, we talked a lot about competent supervisors. I know when we describe what's needed as a supervisor in Ontario, so regardless of the sector, whether we're talking about construction or the electrical utility, whether we're talking about mining, what attributes would you say would make up a competent supervisor in an Ontario workplace?

Jody Young:

Yeah, if an employer assigns someone to supervisory duties, it means they're giving that person charge of the workplace or authority over a worker, so the employer must ensure that the person they have assigned is qualified for the increased responsibilities they have. Typically, these qualifications come in the form of knowledge, training, and experience. They know the job their workers are performing. They know how to ensure it's done safely and effectively. That doesn't just mean they have the most seniority or they're a veteran of the workplace or a person who's paid their dues, it's much more involved than that.

Keeping up-to-date with new training opportunities like working at heights or supervisor health and safety awareness, or those on offer from the IHSA are key components here, as is being familiar with any or all equipment their workers are needing to use. The supervisor also needs to be familiar with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, as well as the regulations that apply to their workplace. There are several specific duties that apply to a supervisor, but their familiarity with workplace health and safety regulations needs to extend beyond those specifics to ensure their workers are protected. Most importantly, a competent supervisor will be able to leverage their knowledge, training, and experience, and regulatory familiarity to ensure they're aware of any potential or actual danger to the health and safety in the workplace and communicate those issues to their workforce.

Ken Rayner:

Well, that's great. That gives us a much better understanding of what's required from a competency perspective. How about if we look at some of the tasks that are performed in the workplace, what are some of the tasks when executed by a supervisor in a competent and complete manner that can make significant contributions to a safe and healthy workplace?

Jody Young:

Of course, every workplace is different, and some tasks or areas may need more attention than others. When a supervisor performs and evaluates their duties competently and completely, many of the hazards that lead to injury or illness at a workplace may be eliminated. First and foremost, the supervisor needs to be present in the workplace, in control of the workplace of the area they are supervising, and responsive to what's happening. On occasions where something comes up and a supervisor is required to be elsewhere, they must ensure that a competent person can fill in during their absence. A supervisor also needs to ensure that they are part of an open communication system so that workers feel free to alert them to any observed potential developing or existing hazards in the workplace. In fact, the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* says that workers have a legal right to expect that type of support.

They need to make sure that workers have been made aware of any potential hazards in the workplace, what they may need in the form of training, written instructions, and personal protective equipment has not only been provided to them, but is also being followed and used properly. Something as simple as ensuring that workplace inspections are being conducted as needed are also things that make an enormous impact. Machinery, equipment, temporary structures, means of egress and access, and other worker facilities are in constant state of use and potentially disrepair. Spotting these issues before they develop through this inspection process can save lives, without a doubt.

Ken Rayner:

Wow, that's some great guidance for those that are becoming supervisors, those that are supervisors. And for those people that have been supervisors, Jodi, for a long period of time in Ontario, things are changing, right? There's some real changes going on in the workplace today. Supervisors, historically, they've been focused on eliminating and controlling physical hazards in the workplace. What other types of hazards are supervisors expected to address today?

Jody Young:

That's an excellent question, Ken. Obviously, if the ongoing pandemic has taught us anything, it's that how we execute our duties and responsibilities to protect workers is constantly changing, and that not all hazards are easily observed. Supervisors need to be able to recognize changes in the behaviors and attitudes of their workforce, and be able to encourage those workers and make determinations. Things such as COVID fatigue, complacency, fitness for duty, and other mental health factors can be just as debilitating and perilous, if not more so, than physical hazards.

If a supervisor has a worker under their charge that for some reason is unable to perform their duties without causing potential harm to themselves or others within the workplace, this needs to be addressed in a competent and compassionate manner. The ultimate roles and responsibilities of supervisors may not have changed, but how they perform them most certainly has. Employers need to ensure they are providing the support their supervisors need to recognize and address these intangible hazards too.

Ken Rayner:

Wow. So we've talked about and understood competency and the tasks that are required and that the workplace is constantly changing, and we're going from physical hazards to psychological hazards. It's a lot of responsibility for a supervisor who's just been made a supervisor. What suggestions would you have for an individual that has been appointed a supervisor in the workplace and is now thinking about what else they need to do?

Jody Young:

Making the transition into a supervisory position can be incredibly challenging and also rewarding. First, immersing yourself in any available information and training that can bolster your skills, confidence, and competence is recommended. The IHSA can help with many of these sector-specific materials here, and the basics of supervising is certainly a good start, but also keeping an open eye towards leadership and mentorship skill-building is recommended as well. Second, building and maintaining the relationships with workers you have charge over is instrumental in keeping a safe and healthy and efficient workplace. New supervisors need to recognize that friendships they've had before stepping into the role could be strained, and that in taking the necessary steps to fulfill your duties as a competent supervisor may not always be popular. Having the ability to listen, interpret, explain with compassion and clarity goes a very long way. Finally, don't be afraid to ask for help.

Your employer has the duty to ensure that you are provided with the necessary tools to perform as a competent supervisor, but you may not always know exactly what you need. Knowing what you need is one thing, being prepared to request it is something else entirely. Also, the help you need may not always come from your employer. Your workers, your joint health and safety committee members, your worker safety representatives and other supervisors and their teams are all instrumental to maintaining that internal responsibility system or IRS at the workplace, and a well-functioning IRS can ensure a safe and healthy workplace.

Ken Rayner:

Jody, I have to ask you about perhaps an interaction between a new supervisor and an inspector with the Ministry of Labour and Training and Skills Development. As you can well appreciate, a new supervisor, even an experienced one, having a ministry inspector come on site can be at some times, I guess, intimidating. So what would you see as your ideal interaction between a Ministry of Labour, Training, and Skills Development inspector and a supervisor at a workplace?

Jody Young:

When an MLTSD inspector arrives at a project, there's an expectation that any supervisor they encounter will be familiar with ongoing work, be able to identify any potential or active hazards that may exist, as well as be able to explain what measures and procedures have been put into place to protect their workforce on site. The supervisor will also be able to discuss methods and procedures that may be upcoming further in the lifespan of the project and the hazards those might present, as well as the safeguards that might need to be implemented.

Our inspectors will ask to see and discuss the most recent workplace inspections that have been conducted internally and to observe what levels of due diligence have been exercised. If a contravention is observed by our inspector, the expectation is that the supervisor will begin coordinating efforts to achieve compliance. Sometimes this can happen immediately while the inspector remains on the project, but other times achieving compliance may take a little bit longer.

In those circumstances, communication from the supervisor to our inspector is key to ensuring that the hazard caused by the contravention has been dealt with so that the work can either resume or continue safely. Ultimately, our inspectors and the supervisors they interact with share a common cause to ensure that every worker in Ontario has a safe place at work, they can return home to their families and loved ones at the end of every work day.

Ken Rayner:

Absolutely, and that is our objective every day in what we do, is everybody going home safe at the end of the day. And Jody Young from the Ministry of Labour, Training, and Skills Development, thank you so much for joining us on the *IHSA Safety Podcast* for this discussion regarding supervisors. I'm sure that our listeners will take away from this podcast a whole host of really good advice, and maybe the next time that the Ministry of Labour, Training, and Skills Development Inspector comes on site, it won't be as intimidating, so thank you very much for joining us.

Jody Young:

Thank you so much for having me.

Enzo Garritano:

Thanks for listening. To hear more in this series, join Ken Rayner as he speaks to other IHSA subject matter experts at ih sasafetypodcast.ca. Thanks for listening. I'm Enzo Garritano.

Announcer:

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Thanks for listening.