

'Conversational Gambits'

Linda Ley



Key Points

- A recent IOSH article – December 2018 (and a similar one in March 2017) – stated that successful managers needed 50% soft skills and 50% technical knowledge.
- Often, Safety Officers – especially when new in post – try to do too much too soon.
- It is tempting to be over-zealous in an effort to quickly 'make your mark'.
- It is more important to listen to employees – those who know their jobs well - and make an effort to see health and safety from their point of view and understand their work problems and the constraints of the operation.
- Research the operation to understand the practicalities before imposing safety changes.
- The art of conversation challenges are: how to convey criticism without dwelling on fault; showing a sincere concern for colleagues; dealing with resistance.
- When highlighting faults, address the whole group – do not single out an individual.
- Focus your efforts on those individuals likely to be most resistant. These employees are often quite influential within the group. Try to get to know them and understand their personality. If you can persuade them to your point of view then others will follow.
- Make requests, don't dictate. Respect employees in their role and they will likely respond well.
- Avoid appearing to patronise.
- Be encouraged by marginal gains eg offer choices of PPE to gain compliance.
- Quote legislation as a last resort.
- Accept that you may need some help; you may not always know the answer to the problem.