



COAA

Toolbox
Talks



HOP PRINCIPLES

HOP Principle – People Make Mistakes

Why it's important: Mistakes are part of being human. Recognizing this helps us shift from blame to learning.

What are the benefits?

- Safer systems
- When we accept that errors happen, we can design systems to fail safely and protect each other
- Leverages people's expertise to continuously improve systems
- Builds safeguards to fail safely

Key Points

- Mistakes are inevitable in complex systems.
- Errors are not personal failures; they're signals that something in the system needs attention.
- The goal isn't to eliminate all errors, but to design systems that allow errors to occur safely.

Examples

Traditional View: A worker forgets to lock out a valve. The response? Immediate discipline

HOP Approach: The team asks, "What made it easy to forget?" They discover the lockout checklist is buried in a separate system and hard to access. The checklist is redesigned and integrated into the workflow.

Closing

Mistakes are normal. Let's stop asking "Who messed up?" and start asking "What can we learn?"

Open the floor: What's one thing we could change today to make it easier to work safely?

Mistakes happen – and when they do, we try to understand why not who.

Natural Reaction

"Why did you do that?"

"Who is responsible?"

"Do you have any idea what that's going to cost us?"

HOP Responses

"Thank you for letting me know"

"How can we learn from this?"

"I know admitting this wasn't easy. Thank you for being honest"

HOP Principle – Blame Fixes Nothing

Why it's important: Blame prevents us from understanding the real causes of incidents and discourages people from speaking up

What are the benefits?

- Avoids finger-pointing when incidents occur
- Problems are solved collaboratively and proactively
- Encourages open reporting of issues without fear
- Normalizes learning conversations after incidents
- Uses team reviews to understand system weaknesses

Key Points

- Blame focuses on individuals instead of systems.
- Blame creates fear and discourages reporting of near misses and unsafe conditions.
- Asking 'what' failed instead of 'who' failed leads to better learning and improvement of the system.

Examples

Traditional View: A technician is blamed for skipping a step in a procedure. The result? Silence and fear.

HOP Approach: The team investigates why the step was skipped and finds the procedure is unclear and hard to follow. Involve those who regularly do that procedure to revise it and train the team.

Closing

Blame fixes nothing. Let's shift our focus from who failed to what failed.

Open the floor: What's one thing we can do today to encourage learning instead of blame

Blame stops improvement, hinders learning and breeds a culture of fear and unsafe conditions

Natural Reaction

"Who did it"

"Why did you let this happen"

"You really messed up"

HOP Responses

"What do you think caused this"

"I'm not here to point fingers"

"How can we make it better"

HOP Principle – Context Drives Behavior

Why it's important: Understanding the context helps us see why people make certain decisions.

What are the benefits?

- Encourages empathy and deeper understanding of worker decisions
- Helps identify system weaknesses and areas for improvement
- Reduces repeated errors by addressing root causes
- Builds trust and psychological safety among teams
- Supports proactive safety measures and continuous learning

Key Points

- Context can include time of day, workload, stress, pressure, tool/equipment availability, and environment.
- People adapt to get work done – understanding how and why is key.
- Without understanding context, we risk repeating the same errors.

Examples

Traditional View: A worker skips a step in a procedure. The assumption? Carelessness

HOP Approach: The team learns the step was skipped because the lighting was poor and the worker was rushed. They improve lighting and adjust schedules

Closing

Context matters. Let's shift from blame to learning, stop assuming, and start understanding.

Open the floor: What's one thing we can change to better support our team's real work conditions?

Circumstances, emotions and experiences influence our actions, behaviors and decisions

Natural Reaction

"This hasn't happened before"

"You should've known better"

"The procedure is written that way for a reason"

HOP Responses

"Tell me more" or "Help me understand"

"Show me how you normally do this"

"I can see myself doing the same thing if I were in your shoes"

HOP Principle – Learning & Improving is Vital

Why it's important: Learning proactively from everyday work in addition to incidents helps us build safer systems.

What are the benefits?

- Builds a proactive safety culture
- Encourages innovation and creativity
- Reduces repeat incidents by addressing systematic issues
- Empowers workers to contribute to solutions
- Strengthens trust and collaboration across teams

Key Points

- Learning should be continuous and built into daily work.
- We learn not only from mistakes but also from successful adaptations.
- Workers closest to the work hold valuable insights for improvement.

Examples

Traditional View: A near miss is ignored because no one was hurt.

HOP Approach: The team investigates the near miss, learns from it, improves safeguards and updates procedures to prevent future incidents.

Closing

Learning is vital. Let's make it part of everything we do.

Open the floor: What's one thing we've learned recently that could help us improve today?

Adopting a learning mindset to understand how our people interact with systems every day work enables cocreation of solutions

Natural Reaction

"That's just the way things are"

"We don't have the time or money right now to do that"

"Don't give me your excuses"

HOP Responses

"I'm always open to hearing ideas about improvements"

"Can you show me how it happened"

"Let's plan a pause to check-in and adjust if we need to"

HOP Principle – How we respond matters

Why it's important: Responding with empathy and curiosity encourages openness and learning.

What are the benefits?

- Builds psychological safety and trust
- Encourages open communication and learning
- Reduces fear and defensiveness in the workplace
- Strengthens team cohesion and morale
- Supports a culture of continuous improvement

Key Points

- Reactions can shut down communication; responses can open it up.
- Responding calmly and with curiosity builds psychological safety.
- How leaders respond sets the tone for the entire team and future interactions.

Examples

Traditional View: A supervisor reacts angrily to a mistake, causing the team to stop reporting issues.

HOP Approach: The supervisor responds with appreciation and curiosity, leading to productive discussion and system improvements.

Closing

How we respond matters. Let's choose curiosity over judgment.

Open the floor: What's one way we can respond better to challenges starting today?

Responding negatively to bad news can get in the way of a valuable learning opportunity

Natural Reaction

Using a raised voice

Jumping to solutions or conclusions

Being judgmental or making assumptions

HOP Responses

Using a calm voice

Being curious and empathetic

Showing gratitude and humility