

WORKPLACE CONVERSATIONS TO SUPPORT ENGAGED DRIVING

As a supervisor, you play an important role in keeping those you supervise safe. Often, the path to safety is finding ways to have meaningful conversations. Conversations about distracted and engaged driving are crucial.

Distracted driving is anything that takes a driver's eyes off the road, hands off the wheel, or mind off driving. Distracted driving significantly contributes to motor vehicle crashes. A person's chance of being involved in a crash nearly doubles when they are using a cell phone and more than doubles when they are texting.¹ Engaged driving keeps a driver's full attention on the task of driving.

As a supervisor, it's easy to tell those you supervise what to do, lecture, or give advice. Instead, try inviting them to participate in a conversation to explore distracted and engaged driving by "talking with" as opposed to "talking to" them. Having conversations engages the logical part of the brain, gets people thinking, and can strengthen your relationship. It is more than just asking for someone's opinion. It is about truly hearing and valuing what they are saying.

DISTRACTED DRIVING INCLUDES:

- using a cell phone to send a text message, talk, browse the internet or social media, or view photos or videos
- using a navigation system
- eating or drinking
- grooming tasks like applying makeup or brushing your teeth
- talking to passengers
- adjusting music
- reaching for objects
- focusing on people or pets in your vehicle

ENGAGED DRIVING INCLUDES:

- putting a cell phone down or out of reach
 - setting your navigation system, or checking maps or directions, before you begin driving, or pulling over when you do so
 - avoiding eating, drinking, or grooming tasks
 - asking passengers to limit their conversations to help you remain focused
 - assuring your radio/entertainment devices are set before driving
 - pulling over before tending to another person or pet in the vehicle
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Those you supervise may not know exactly what to say. That's okay. Conversations take time and don't need to happen in one sitting. Be patient and give them time to process, reflect, and respond.

Here are four steps you can follow to have a conversation that supports engaged driving.

STEP 1. EXPLORE DISTRACTED AND ENGAGED DRIVING

Start by asking open-ended questions to better understand their thoughts, feelings, and challenges related to distracted and engaged driving. You could say:

- *“There is a lot of talk about distracted driving. What do you think that means?”*
- *“What are some ways drivers can be distracted?”*
- *“What distractions challenge you as a driver?”*
- *“Why is understanding these challenges important?”*
- *“What is it like to ride with a driver who is distracted?”*
- *“What does it mean for a driver to be engaged in the task of driving?”*

Those you supervise may respond to you with a question. Instead of answering immediately, give them time to think. You could say:

- *“That’s a great question. What do you think?”*
- *“How would you answer that?”*

CONVERSATION TIPS

- Avoid interrupting, judging (*“That’s a bad idea.”*), giving advice (*“I think you should....”*) or answering for them.
 - Pay attention to your body language when you are talking and when you are listening (e.g., turn toward them, nod, make eye contact when appropriate).
 - If you do not quite understand what they are saying or you need more information, you could say:
 - *“Tell me more about...”*
 - *“Help me understand...”*
 - *“Let me be sure I got everything you are saying...”*
 - *“Why is that?”*
 - Allow yourself to be in the conversation with them. After they've answered, you could say:
 - *“For me, I can find that...”*
 - *“I feel like...”*
 - *“I think that...”*
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STEP 2. CLARIFY EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES

From what you have learned, continue the conversation to clarify expectations and policies about distracted and engaged driving. Start by discussing what is valued within your workplace. You could ask:

- *“When we think about driving and safety, what things are truly important to us as a workplace?”*
- *“What kind of drivers do we want to be?”*
- *“How do we want passengers to feel when we are driving?” (If appropriate)*
- *“How important is it that we take steps to avoid distracted driving?”*

If you already have workplace policies about distracted driving, engage those you supervise in a conversation about the policies within the context of your specific work environment.

- *“What are your reactions to the policy?”*
- *“From your perspective, how is the policy working?”*
- *“Is there anything that concerns you?”*
- *“What do you think is the most challenging part of the policy within our work environment?”*
- *“What ideas do you have for helping all of us be accountable to the policy?”*

Talk about how you could share the policies your workplace has created with friends and family. You could ask:

- *“How may we tell our colleagues, friends, and family that we have a workplace policy that we won’t ...”*

Set the expectation that it is okay to remind one another about the policies. Discuss how you will remind each other about the policies and what has been established if the policies are violated. You could say:

- *“What responsibility do we have if one of us is engaging in an unsafe behavior while driving?”*
- *“How do we draw attention to the policy?”*
 - *“How do the tone or words we use matter?”*
 - *“What are some things we could say or do?”* For example:
 - Proactively remind in a gentle, non-public way by saying, *“Remember to put your cell phone on silent.”*
- *“What would logical consequences be for violating the policies?”*
 - Rather than punishment, a logical consequence is about supporting the learning process and strengthening decision-making skills. Logical consequences should come soon after an unsafe behavior and need to be provided in a way that maintains a healthy relationship. For example: limiting driving, limiting passengers, etc.

Be sure that you both are on the same page about the expectations of your workplace policies. You could say, *“I want to make sure we are on the same page. Tell me your understanding of what we are agreeing to avoid distracted driving?”*

STEP 3. PRACTICE AND SUPPORT THE POLICIES

It takes time to establish habits (and to break bad habits). Supporting the positive engaged driving behaviors you want to see is an important part of the learning process. Ongoing conversations to support those you supervise are opportunities for engagement and connection.

Model the positive behaviors you want to see. Modeling is an important teaching tool.

Check in to see how it is going. Discuss any challenges they may have and how to manage those challenges. You could say:

- *“How are the expectations we’ve established going?”*
- *“Are you struggling at all?”*
- *“Have you implemented any of the ideas to help you drive distraction-free?”*
- *“Were you able to speak up when you saw a coworker or supervisor engage in distracted driving? How did it go? How can I support you to feel more confident in speaking up when you see unsafe driving behaviors?”*

Follow through with logical consequences when needed. With your feelings in check, engage in a discussion about the expectations you established about engaged driving. Logical consequence should be applied as a teachable moment.

STEP 4. RECOGNIZE EFFORT

Your recognition can go a long way in promoting positive behaviors. Your praise and encouragement can make a big difference. Recognize effort, quality, and small successes. You could say:

- *“I appreciated when you chose not to answer your phone when I called and you were driving.”*
- *“I was glad to see you choosing not to reach for something while you were driving..”*
- *“I noticed you put your phone away before you started driving. Great job!”*
- *“I appreciate that you spoke up when you thought I was distracted. Thanks for the reminder to stay focused on driving.”*

CLOSING

Keeping those you supervise safe doesn’t happen by chance. Having conversations about distracted and engaged driving and following your workplace’s policies play an important role. You have a strong influence on the decisions of those you supervise, and your efforts to have conversations about engaged driving can improve safety for your workplace.

REFERENCES

1. Owens, J.M., Dingus, T.A., Guo, F., Fang, Y., Perez, M. & McClafferty, J. (2018). Crash risk of cell phone use while driving: A case – crossover analysis of naturalistic driving data. AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. Retrieved from https://aaafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/CellPhoneCrashRisk_FINAL.pdf



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