BBS and BMT… What's the Difference?

Both Behavior Based Safety (BBS) and Behavior Management Techniques (BMT) are based in the science of behavior. Behaviors provide a leading measure of safety and measuring them creates the opportunity to provide feedback and deliver reinforcement on a more regular basis, which can have a positive impact on safety.

BBS is a set of techniques developed by behavioral psychologists that are applied similarly in organizations. Although applications of BBS may vary slightly, they all use a checklist to observe behaviors (and sometimes conditions) and provide feedback either at the individual level, the group level, or both. The fact that BBS is a set of techniques makes implementation fairly straightforward and doesn't require people within the organization to have a deep understanding of behavioral science.

The downside of not needing to have a deep understanding of behavioral science to implement BBS techniques is that it is easy for these techniques to be misapplied just slightly, resulting in the process not having the intended impact or even making things worse. Unfortunately, this happens so often that many labor unions and other groups strongly oppose the use of BBS, calling it a "Blame the Worker" system.

In contrast, BMT is a more comprehensive and flexible approach that teaches people behavior science blended with project management. By teaching behavioral science, BMT teaches people a skill set and knowledge base to apply the science to any of a number of problems in business and safety.

Behavioral science tells us that the current environment influences our behavior. Shifts in the current environment can help create new behaviors, including safer ones. If BBS, or any safety initiative, is applied without an understanding of how the environment is currently impacting behavior, we cannot be sure that the new initiative will be a positive influence, regardless of the intended impact. For example, if we ask people to observe each other's behaviors in an environment that is low on trust and with poor relationships, the observation process will feel punishing and people will avoid it. If we give behavioral data to leaders who aren't well versed in how to use that knowledge to have a positive impact, the data is likely to be used in a way that inadvertently demoralizes the workforce. If there is low engagement, people will probably

not conduct observations without a significant amount of coercion. Having to coerce people to engage with safety (by using either a "do this or else" approach OR with incentives) does not advance the safety culture. These situations occur all too often but can easily be addressed with an understanding of behavioral science.

Because people trained in BMT gain a deep understanding of behavioral science, they are able to apply the many tools, including observation and feedback, in a way that fits each unique situation in their business and has a positive impact. BMT empowers people, improves relationships, and develops great leaders. Understanding the current environment, and the way shifts in the environment impact behavior, dramatically increases the likelihood that any initiative, BBS or otherwise, will succeed.

The success of your various initiatives depends on a deep understanding of behavior and fluent application of behavioral science techniques by leaders throughout the organization.

BBS

- Easy to roll out
- Gets at the root of some problems
- Simple - doesn't require deep understanding of behavioral science to work
- Limited to specific set of behaviors, difficult to apply to other challenges
- Focus is primarily on front line workers, less on leadership
- Often requires R- to keep it going
- Prescriptive approach that can be learned quickly
- Doesn't account for relationships or environment
- Without coaching, it is easy for leaders to use data in negative way

BMT

- Advanced use of behavioral science that requires more understanding and takes more time to learn & implement
- Considers current work environment and site before prescribing solutions
- Focus is first on leadership, who then focuses on the group
- Puts emphasis on relationships
- High engagement, encourages use of R+
- Flexible approach that provides a set of skills and knowledge base that is applicable anywhere in the business, not just safety
- Leaders are coached to use data in a way that has a positive impact
- Gets to the root of problems

(Overlap)
- Based on the science of behavior analysis
- Utilizes goal setting & feedback