

Human Performance: Make the Next Step Clearer

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Why this matters

People keep work moving by noticing problems and adapting. They can also miss a step or misunderstand a signal. Look at the conditions around today's task and strengthen the protection before a mistake can become an injury.

Objective: Identify one difficult or confusing step and verify an approved improvement before exposure.

Key hazards or failure points

Look-alike equipment; unclear labels; interruptions; incomplete handoffs; conflicting instructions; unavailable tools; time pressure; protection that depends on someone always remembering.

Practical controls

- Ask the people doing the task where confusion or interruption is likely. Include what helps them recover and what makes the work harder than the written plan suggests.
- Resolve conflicting instructions and missing resources. Use approved changes to layout, identification, sequence or safeguards. Keep required controls in place while an improvement is being reviewed.
- Agree who owns each critical handoff, how it is acknowledged and when to pause after an interruption. Where a procedure requires independent verification, use the specified qualified or authorized people.

Verify It in the Field

With hazardous action prevented, walk through the next important step. Compare equipment identification and instructions with the actual setup. Ask a worker to explain the intended action and the condition that must be present first.

Rehearse the handoff or interruption response using a safe example. The receiver repeats the relevant instruction and the sender resolves any difference. This does not authorize operating equipment, manipulating isolations or bypassing the formal procedure.

Check the improvement against the problem it should solve: can the worker distinguish the item, obtain the right tool or reach the required support? Record the issue, approved change, actual check result and follow-up owner. Ask what new difficulty the change might introduce.

Stop and reassess

Pause for ambiguous identification, conflicting directions, an interrupted step with uncertain status, or a failed required safeguard. Put the task in its defined safe state. Resolve the uncertainty, re-establish required checks and rebrief before restarting; do not guess where to resume.

Ask the crew

1. Which step is easiest to confuse or lose after an interruption?
2. What change would make that step easier to perform correctly?
3. How will we verify the change and know when to pause?

Before exposure: improve the conditions and check the protection.

Sources: HSE Managing Human Failures; OSHA worker-participation guidance; task procedure.

Free next step: [JHA/JSA planning & field-verification worksheet](#)

Expanded guidance, references, supervisor check and attendance record accompany this talk.