

Welcome to Safety Culture Excellence. Today's topic: Focusing on the Personal Side of Safety. My name is Shawn Galloway and I'm proud to be your host.

Well, hello from beautiful downtown Strasbourg, France. I'm gonna do something a little different today. I'm gonna start off with some thoughts then I'm gonna share with you a recorded conversation that took place yesterday between Terry Mathis and myself.

By the way, in case this is the first time you're listening in, Terry's the founder and CEO of ProAct Safety. So on Wednesday, I joined him on the last part of a project he was working on in Beisheim, France, which is near the French borders of Germany and Switzerland. When it ended yesterday, which was Friday, Terry and I decided to head over here to Strasbourg, which is about an hour away from the client location.

We ended up sharing a taxi and used the time to catch up because, again, we're heading off in separate directions. Terry flew out this morning to begin another project and tomorrow morning, I'll leave from Strasbourg and drive across France to start another one on Monday. We got talking about the topic for today and it sparked a great conversation. As we were a few minutes into it, we realized that the subscribers to this podcast would benefit from the discussion, so I pulled out a little digital recorder that I had in my bag. I started recording Terry sharing his thoughts.

Before I share that, though, let me start with asking you this: Are your employees looking forward to your next safety meeting? And do they all line up afterwards to personally thank you for your message? If your employees or your fellow workers go home at the end of their shift and discuss their day with their family members or their friends, how many of those conversations would be focused on the excitement about being involved in safety?

Is what you're sharing about in safety personal enough to make a positive impact in their home life? We've asked thousands of workers what the definition of or the purpose of safety is and the vast majority of the answers are some sort of variation of "well, to not have an accident" or "to go home the way we came in." Or they say, "We came in with ten fingers and ten toes and the goal is to leave with ten and ten." Those are certainly good answers, but consider expanding it to the goal being the workers will be better informed everyday and the messages sent will be so sticky that they have the ability to be better aware of the low-probability risks in everyday life.

And so they can embed those philosophies in the hearts and minds of their own families. This should be the purpose we have in safety. What you do should help keep everyone safe regardless of where they are: whether it's work, home or driving in between. Ask yourself this, "How well do I make safety communication personal?"

Last week, I had the opportunity to spend four hours in a town hall setting with all the members of the United Steel Workers Union of a company's Kansas, United States location. I was discussing with them some ideas to help improve in safety and as we were wrapping up this successful event, one of the members asked me how I could stand traveling so much. This gave me an opportunity to tell my story of why I got involved and why I care so much, but most importantly, it gave me an opportunity to be personal.



Shawn Galloway
President & COO



Terry Mathis
Founder & CEO

In order to help with the advanced elements that allow sites to reach that level of excellence in their safety culture, you have to be within the culture.

We work with many locations in the Houston, Texas area, which is where we're headquartered. However, most of our work is scattered throughout the world. So to work with these locations, it requires that we essentially live at 30,000 feet. Now, this obviously requires a sacrifice of being away from my family, which is certainly a difficult thing. Well, I'd like to acknowledge that you, too, make a lot of sacrifices. Some of you, like me, have to do a lot of traveling and others come in off-shift or on your free time to help spread the safety philosophy. It's beyond sad when we experience the loss of a co-worker and I'm sure most of you listening have experienced the loss of a family member at one time or another.

So let's do what we can to minimize the risk, not only at the job site, but at home as well. I truly believe that the sacrifices that those in safety make, when we're away from our families, help those that we're supporting go home to theirs. But I don't think it should stop there. The things we communicate, our training and the way we make it personal, help their loved ones be safe as well. To me, that's what safety is all about. You know, personally, I got involved because I care about people. I hope it's fair to say that if you're listening to this, you care more about your people than the organizational metrics.

Both are certainly important, but think about what gets communicated more than anything else in safety. We need to move the focus from the organizational metrics to the personal element if we're gonna truly be successful. So let's now listen in to the conversation. But before we do, please be aware that this was an impromptu discussion with a relatively inexpensive recorder, so please adjust the sound volume, if needed. Here's how it went.

Terry Mathis: As you meet people out there in the world, they typically fall into categories when you think about safety. There are people who really care about it and people who really don't. And I think the more you analyze this, the more you realize is that people don't just care about safety, they care about other people. And the people who care about other people realize that accidents are one of the worst things that can happen to them, and that being injured on the job, off the job, or wherever, is tragic.

And it not only impacts the people: it impacts their families, it impacts all of society. And the people who really care about other people, and about society, are the people who are serious about preventing accidents. They're not willing to accept them and even if they tend to have been brought up in that philosophy: that they're inevitable, that you can't fix them all, it's an imperfect world and everything - it flies in the face of their true beliefs. And so, because of that, they strive to accomplish the impossible; and the impossible is not daunting to them because it's worthwhile.

And so these are the kind of people that work very hard and very diligently to understand where accidents come from and what we can do to get a handle on that and keep them from happening. And there are other people out there in the world, who accept them as inevitable, who have given up or who just simply don't care enough about other people to work as hard as it takes to make themselves successful at grasping this. Some of those people also have been beaten down by their own efforts. They've gone out and tried to prevent accidents that have happened anyway and they've become discouraged and kind of fallen back and retreated into the position, "Well, I tried. I couldn't do anything about it. So, why try again?"

But it's interesting to see the difference between these people and the level of energy that comes out of them when they succeed. When you give them tools that help them truly get a handle on what they've been struggling with all their life, and what they think deep down is really ultimately worthwhile, this enthusiasm comes out and you see people fulfilling at least a part of their life's mission. And feeling so good about themselves and what they've been able to accomplish, that the level of energy they put into it takes it even to another level of success.

Shawn Galloway: You know, one of the tools that I think that we definitely have available to us is the tool of communication. So talk about what are some of the things that you think are important, as it relates to communication to those people, and what you see, in general, that we tend to only communicate.

Terry Mathis: Well, I think communication, like a lot of other things, should start at the top. The first thing that needs to be communicated is the vision: the idea that accidents are preventable. Now, if that's all you communicate, a lot of people disagree, almost instantly. "Not all accidents are preventable. I've seen some that I didn't know how to prevent. I wasn't successful with them." But if you start creating this vision that it seems impossible, but that's only because we haven't figured it out yet, that we're going to go about it knowing that we won't be perfect and we won't be always successful, but that we're not going to give up. We're going to keep working on it. We're going to put that level of energy into it that's necessary to find the breakthroughs, to find the ways that we can do it.

Then the communication needs to turn from that once the vision is created. The communication needs to turn to the strategies. What exactly can we do? And a lot of people will say, "Well, we can't get rid of all accidents." Okay, let's get rid of this kind, let's get rid of this other kind. Let's work on this behavior or that behavior that gets rid of this one category of accidents. And a lot of times, that communication is really the communication of the measurement of progress. That communication defines continuous improvement.

And continuous improvement cycle is what you have to get into to reach perfection in anything. If you can't measure it, you can't improve it. So a lot of times people don't know how they are doing. They don't know how they're doing as a group and a lot of this communication is simply, "Here's how we did." It's score-keeping for lack of a better term. It's a whole culture keeping score on how they're doing in their war against accidents.

Shawn Galloway: Where generally the scores that we tend to communicate out there is the frequency rate. How does that impact the worker when what's communicated to them is their frequency rate, the failure rate, the lagging indicators, how does that impact the employees?

Terry Mathis: Well, in our informal studies, very little. First of all, they don't understand the metric very often, how it's calculated. And even once they understand it, it's like you said, it's their failure rate. So can you be a general and fight a battle with nothing but a casualty count out there on the other end? And it's very difficult; it's very demoralizing for people. You're telling them you're not perfect, you're not perfect, here's a number that says you're not perfect, but you're not telling them how to get better.

And if all you're saying is, "be careful, try harder, strive", then the people don't know exactly what to do. They say, "Well, what do I do? Grit my teeth and care more?" So when you give them these specific

strategies and you start measuring those, it's not, "Well, how many trips and falls did we have?" It's, "How many times or what percentage of the time are we keeping our eyes on our path and where we're going. And when we're not, why are we not? What are the influences out there or what are the barriers, and what can we do to remove them?"

And when they see this 'percent safe' start to go up, this is the measurement that says, I don't know whether I know my team won or lost the game, but now I know what my batting average is. I know what my ERA is. It's a personal metric for safety that tells the individual how they're doing, not just how the organization in which they're a part is doing.

That's why you need a human measurement of safety. If all you have is an organizational measurement of safety, then people, you know they take a certain amount of pride in their organization and their overall team and they want it to be successful, but what happens when a worker has tried very hard to be safe all year, they've accomplished that, they're accident-free for the year, but then you hammer them with the organization's failure rate? It demoralizes the good performers. It tends not to inspire the poor performers.

People need a personal metric, need to know how they are doing in safety. For a culture to measure that, they need a little bit of organization and they need a measurement tool. If you give them a formal measurement, most individuals develop an informal measurement. If someone comes around periodically and says, "You did this, you did this, you did this. I was concerned because you didn't do this," and they talk about the reasons why, that doesn't just give you a metric on the visit. That makes you start to self-measure, and self-measurement is ultimately where safety improvement comes from.

Let me give you an example of how organizational numbers can actually be counterproductive in safety: We had an organization that we were working with recently and one of our meetings ran a little bit long. And one of the people in the meetings was a safety professional who needed to go back to his team and hold a safety meeting. Well, because we ran long and kind of crunched the time available, instead of going back to his office and getting his computer and projector and taking it to the meeting with him, he just went straight to the meeting.

And so not being armed with organizational facts and figures, his total recordable rate, total severity rate, cost of accidents, and everything that he normally presented, in default in the safety meeting, he stood up and he told everybody there how much he cared about them. And how important it was to him that they not get injured on the job and not suffer the pain, the loss of income, the family impact, and everything that accidents could bring. He told his own personal story that that's one of the reasons he was in safety is because he really cared about people.

He had 27 people in this group that he taught and he said at the meeting, 27 people lined up to come shake his hand and tell him that that was the best safety meeting they had ever attended in their whole history at this organization. And he said, "I was a little bit astounded. And I said, 'But why? I always tell you that I care about you and then I show you the figures.'" And he said, "They looked me in the face and said, 'The way we interpret that is: I care about the figures.'" And he said he had never seen that connection, and it wasn't the message he intended to send.

But when we did an assessment at this organization and we asked people, "What is a Total Recordable

Rate?", the answer we got the most often is: a number managers use to get their safety bonus at the end of the year. So you can see where this came from and how this flooding the workforce with organizational data wasn't accomplishing what the organization was really after.

Let's just say if you have to make the message personal, you yourself have to be personal with the people. You have to let them know who you are. People aren't gonna follow you and your values and what you're trying to present out there and communicate priorities until they buy into you first. Now, there's very few messages that one individual can send to another that's more clear than "I don't care."

Shawn Galloway: Good stuff, Terry. Thanks. I hope you enjoyed that. We plan to take some time to try to record more conversations and I promise you, the next one won't be from the back of a taxi. I'd like to close today with a quote by Don Schwartz, who is a pioneer in broadcasting. I really hope you take it to heart. He said this, "No one cares how much you know, unless they know how much you care." Until next time, remember: "In safety, prevention trumps reaction." For more information on Safety Culture Excellence or if you have a topic to suggest, please email us at podcast@proactsafety.com.