

## INCREASING SELF-AWARENESS THROUGH FOCUSED SELF-OBSERVATION (PART 2 OF 3)



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Welcome to Safety Culture Excellence. Today's topic: Part 2 of 3, Increasing Self-Awareness Through Focused Self-Observations. My name is Shawn Galloway, and I'm proud to be your host.



Shawn Galloway  
President & COO

Greetings from Marysville, Kansas, located in the northeast part of the state and along the original Pony Express Trail. Like these noble people who make up our American history, many of today's workers are also working alone. Hence, the importance of this topic.

As today is Part 2 of a 3-part series, I encourage you to please go back and listen to Part 1, for I fear you will miss some great, important information. Now because we have a lot that Terry Mathis, the founder and CEO, will cover, I don't want to delay. So, I hope you enjoy this portion as much as I did. Here we go.



Terry Mathis  
Founder & CEO

"Explore mobile technology. This is kind of interesting. We've got a company right now that just reported back into us. They have a bunch of lone workers, and they were concerned because they couldn't observe them. They were also concerned because they couldn't get these lone workers to attend safety meetings. There was no way to get them to a safety meeting to get the information.

"This company bought all of their mobile workers an iPod Nano. And they've made their safety meetings into podcasts and put them on the iPod Nanos. And they can plug them in, in their trucks, while they drive and listen to their safety meetings, and they did a special thing for them. Now, they told everybody, 'Your iPod will hold so much stuff; half of that's for you. You can put whatever you want on there: music, your own podcast, whatever you want to listen to, books on tape, or whatever you want to listen to while you drive. Keep the other half of that drive clear because the company's gonna put stuff on it.'

"Some of the people that do self-observations talked them into digital recorders. They don't have to write while they drive, or anything else. They pick up this little digital recorder and they record their things into it. They have a checklist on the dash, and they talk into this. We've said, 'Well, you've got to get a pencil or a pen, and a piece of paper to do an observation,' for years and years. Right now, that's not the only way they can be done. And there's a lot of technology out there that you might be able to use, you might be able to utilize for this.

"These little digital recorders have really gotten good lately. And you can turn these things back in and someone can transcribe them, and get all your data back off of those. They're listening to them while they drive, yeah. No, they plug them into their dash, to their dash, right. No, you don't want people wearing headphones while they drive. It hides other road noises that they need to be aware of, and everything. But you can plug an iPod into your radio, your stereo, your speaker system in your vehicle, just like you can a CD or a lot of other things. And that's what they've done with them. There's some pretty nifty little units that you plug into your cigarette lighter; and that actually broadcasts from one to the other. And those work really well, also. So again, I'm not telling you you've got to be high tech and you've got to go with something else. But at least, look at these things and see if there are some things out there that would facilitate this. You sure don't want a driver pulling a little piece of paper out, putting it on the steering wheel, and writing all his information on it while he's going down the road. Either have him wait till he stops to record his information, or look at some of this other technology that's out there.

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"In regular data entry, we've got several people that are using PDAs to actually enter the data. They've got the form on a PDA screen. They can go out and mark their safes and concerns. They can type their comments in. They come back and dock them. It downloads them to the computer. There's a few companies experimenting with that. Some of them like it. Some of them don't. The real holdup on them is the typing the comments. If all you had to do was mark your safes and concerns and check boxes, it'd be fast. It'd be really, really quick. Because you have to write concerns, a lot of times it takes so long to write something on a PDA.

"I don't know if any of you use things like that. But mine has a little keyboard like that. I do some text messaging every now and then. I use as few words as I can possibly use because it really takes a long time to type a message on a little tiny keyboard. What they're finding is it doesn't save them time and that was one of the main concerns. Could we enter data this way, and would it save time? But explore these things and see if there's something else out there that you can do.

"Remember the old acronym KISS: Keep It Simple; you know, several other things for the last S that I've heard out there. But one of the things that you want to do, if you're gonna ask people to do self-observations, its got to be dirt simple. It's got to be something they can plug into their head and don't have to do a lot of referencing and other things for. You want it to be simple for them. That means probably an even shorter checklist. And it means a very, very easy way to record it and to do some other things with it. You don't want them to have to manually manipulate a lot of paper and other things.

"Now, warning: the weakness of a self-observation is a habit. And the reason that this is such a tricky thing for a self-observation is that self-observing very often misses habits. It's not that it overlooks them. It's not that they're forgiving of them. You just don't even see them.

"Some of you that have been through our training recently have seen we've added this within just the last year, or so. There's a thing about the human brain in the training in here. We talk about the prefrontal lobe, the front part of the brain, and the basal ganglia. The prefrontal lobe is the part of your brain you do conscious thinking and problem solving. And things in the basal ganglia is where you form habits. You get something so automatic that you can do it without thinking about it. It's happening in your basal ganglia.

"When I ask you if you do that thing, you search your prefrontal lobe looking for it. Guess why you don't find it? It's not there. Habits become so automatic, that you don't have to consciously think about them to do them. Some habits, anyway, can become that automatic. So if your problem behaviors are deeply embedded, habitual behaviors, you're gonna have to do something extraordinary to get self-observations to recognize those. And there are some extraordinary things you can do. I'll give you a few examples as we get into this.

"Driving habits are very famous for this. How often do you get across the line? How many times does your signal blink before you start to make a lane change? Some of the things like that. If you ask people, 'Do you signal for a lane change?' A lot of people will say, 'Yeah, I do.' And yet, if you follow them out there on the road, under certain circumstances, they don't. Now, maybe they do sometimes, and they don't other times. But they can't tell you which times they do and which times they don't. They're more likely to be able to tell you which times they do, than which times they don't, because they think they're doing it automatically all the time, and they're not. And sometimes, giving them a reality check makes them better

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self-checkers.

"So, one of the tricks to getting self-observation started is to put somebody with them for a short period of time: to get them into the self-observation mode, to kick it all off, to get it started. Pair somebody up with the driver and say, 'Listen, I can't take you all the way from this site to that site, but drive me out to the front gate and back and let me give you some feedback on what you're doing, on the things on your checklist.' And sometimes, that outside start helps people to better recognize what they're doing.

"Used to use this story in the training, something my son did for me. He told me, 'Hey, Dad, you don't stop at stop signs.' I said, 'Sure, I do.' He said, 'Nope.' He had just taken Driver's Ed. Well, I took Driver's Ed, a million years ago, too, back when we rode dinosaurs and Fred Flintstone stuff. That's what my kids think anyway. When I took Driver's Ed, they told you you've got to come to a complete stop at stop signs. And I deliberately tried to do that. And I found out early in my career, I asked a policeman one time, 'What's the difference, a complete stop and roll?' And he said, '\$75.' And so I learned that the hard way when I was a young kid and couldn't afford it, either.

"So, I thought I came to a complete stop at a stop sign. My son told me I didn't. I found three stop signs that they had added late in my neighborhood that were exceptions. I didn't come to a complete stop at those because there was nothing to stop for, essentially, out there. I mean, I can justify it all I want. But if you ask me if I did, I'd say, 'Yes.' When he saw me do it, he found exceptions. The same thing happens.

"When I told people at my office about the experiment we did many years ago with drivers, where we made them make their signal click three times before they started a lane change, guess what everybody at my office started doing? They started watching me when they rode with me. And they said, 'You don't click three times before you make a lane change.' But it's true, and this is one of the blind spots out there. This is why, also, even if you can only periodically, once a year, give people a reality check, it makes self-observations fabulously more realistic: for somebody else to give you an outside outlook. They will make you start to look for things that you will never catch the first time on your own. And that's what you're after in these observations.

"So, can you pair somebody up first thing? Can you give them examples of these? Can you give them a periodic reality check? All of those things make self-observations work better. Now, if you're gonna use self-observations, let me give you some guidelines, some things that you want to do in the self-observations.

"Guideline No. 1: self-observations can never be reflective. What are we talking about here? You can't get to the end of the day and say, 'How did I do? Did I do this today?' You can't do it that way. They are totally, fabulously, worthlessly inaccurate and unreliable to do it that way.

"How many times today did I signal? How many times today did I not signal? You won't reconstruct it with any kind of accuracy, whatsoever. It won't give you any insight into your own behavior. And it won't be an accurate measurement. So never let drivers say, 'Well, at the end of your drive today, take out your little checklist and tell me how many times you did this and how many times you didn't.' Worthless: does not impact their performance, is not accurate data. That's the two reasons for an observation, right? Impact people's performance and gather good data to help you understand things. Neither one happens with

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reflective observations. Believe me, we have tried them this way about 500 times, and it never, never turns out reliable.

"A self-observation needs a planned beginning. What's going to trigger somebody to do an observation? Now, ideally – do your drivers have radios in their vehicles? They have some way that you can communicate to them other than talking on cell phones while they're driving down the road? The ideal thing that you could do is call them up and say, 'Do an observation.' And you could space these out on whatever time frame that you want. An observation needs to have a beginning.

"Now, if you can't do that, you can do other things. We used to tell Coca-Cola drivers, 'Every time you pass a Pepsi truck, do a self-observation.' Okay? There are things that you can do. Tell your people, 'Every time you pass our competitors trucks, do an observation.' You know what they found with that, though? They passed their competitors trucks the last five miles going to the well. They don't pass them out on the highway very often. So, guess when they get their observations done? But that was on purpose because most of their accidents happened within five miles of the well, there on the dirt roads, going out there to it, rather than on the highways and everything getting out there to the big part. So that was on purpose for them.

"But something needs to trigger the observation. Now, you can predetermine that. You can say, 'Listen, next Thursday at 10:00 do an observation.' And set an alarm in the truck, or something like that. Give them a little portable alarm clock. Give them a watch that has an alarm on it, like that, and preset it. When it goes off, you do an observation.

"Now, what does this accomplish by having something trigger the observation from outside like that? It makes you take a snapshot. It keeps it from being reflective, which is one of the things that you want it to be. You don't want this to happen. It's like an outside observation. You don't know when the observer is gonna show up. They show up and say, 'Hey, Charles, can I do an observation? Good time to do an observation?' Like that.

"Now, if you say, 'Well, sometime today, I'll do an observation on myself. Hm, I wonder when it ought to be.' You will pick an opportune time to do it. You'll pick a time that's easy, rather than a time that's meaningful to do this observation. Or, you'll fall back into this reflective thing and say, 'Well, I didn't get it done today but I remember something that happened at 10:00 this morning. I'm gonna write that down on the card and call it an observation.' You don't want it happening that way, if at all possible. Something needs to trigger the observation. When you leave the facility, give yourself ten minutes to do an observation. Set your timer when you get in the truck for 10 to 15 minutes. Do an observation while you're driving down the road. If driving down the road is what you want the observation to be.

"Yeah, anything like this can trigger it, but it needs to be triggered. It needs to be - have start time, and not just, 'Well, I'll decide when it was. By the way, that was kind of interesting. So was that. I'll make this an observation.' You don't want people deciding after the fact that this is going to be an observation. You want a bell ringing, and here is where the observation starts; not literally a bell ringing, but something like that happening over there.

"You want to specify the length of observation. Again, self-observations can be, if you want to be, a little

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bit longer. But they don't have to be. I want you to check yourself for the next ten minutes, while you're driving down the road, and tell me, 'Did you do this? Did you do this? Did you do this?' Two or three things, and watch yourself doing it.

"Now, remember this. You're gonna gather some data and you're gonna see what's happening out there, to an extent. But the real good of this is going to come from the workers self-checking. If they're self-checking, what happens when you go out there and you say, 'Hey, Charles, I'm gonna do an observation. And you know the five items that are on my checklist over here.' What are you gonna do for the next five minutes? You're gonna try to do what's on the checklist. And guess what? You're starting to form the habit of doing the things that are on the checklist. So the good from the observation comes from you becoming conscious of the checklist stuff, and trying to do them more regularly.

"Now, if you're not doing them, may be a perception, may be a habit, may be a barrier getting in the way of it. I capture that data, and I take it back to the steering and say, 'The person observed did this, this, this, and this, but they couldn't do that because of this.' And we identify those kinds of things. But the real good of this observation came from you being focused on the things on the checklist, and doing your best to do them.

"The same thing will happen with self-observations. The driver that's out there in the field will benefit from doing the observation, not just gathering the data. So, having this guy ask himself, or having this lady ask herself, 'Am I doing these things? Am I doing these three or four, whatever it is, critical things while I'm driving?' And checking that and saying, 'Do it do those all the time?' They will become better self-checkers.

"Now, again, what are the blind spots out there? Habits, right? So if it's too automatic, these are the things they tend to not catch."

Thanks, Terry, for some great ideas. Now Part 3 of this topic, closing it out, will be released next week. In the meantime, if you have any ideas you'd like to share, as always, please feel free to contact us.

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](mailto:podcast@proactsafety.com).