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Welcome to Safety Culture Excellence. Today's topic: SWOT vs. SWAT for Safety. My name is Shawn Galloway, and I'm proud to be your host.

Greetings from Punksatony, Pennsylvania, located in the central part of the state, which is famous for being the location where we celebrate Groundhog Day on the 2nd of February every year.

Now, in this week's podcast, I'm gonna talk about two popular acronyms: SWOT and SWAT, that both sound like "swat." Now for those listening outside of the United States, acronyms are popular mostly within the English language. Now an acronym, as dictionary.com defines it, is a word formed from the initial letters, or group of letters of words, in a set phrase or series of words, such as OPEC, from the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

Well, in this week's podcast, you're going to hear two common themes. Ray Stata, the co-founder of Analog Devices, once said, "The rate at which organization and an individual learns may well become the only sustainable competitive advantage." So, first we need to be looking for ways to continuously improve. Marshall Goldsmith's book says it best: "What got you here won't get you there." So we have to be trying to find new ways to continuously improve in order to ensure sustainability in what we're creating. Because what we're trying to accomplish, after all, is just improving safety by continuously identifying and reducing the risks that people are exposed to.

And second, it tends to work best if you can identify those opportunities by listening to the culture. For if you can accomplish this, I assure you, it's inevitable that you're going to find what Deming once called 'profound knowledge', rather than just simply searching for the latest and greatest special weapons and tactics.

I hope you enjoy this podcast, for I'm honored to be able to share my ideas with you, and I hope to be able to hear yours as well. So feel free to contact us anytime if there's anything you'd like to share, or if you have a question you'd like for me to answer in one of the podcasts. The lines are always open.

"I had this idea when Terry and I were talking one time. There's something in marketing they do that's called a SWOT analysis. It stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. But the other way you can pronounce SWOT is how a lot of people define as Special Weapons and Tactics. A lot of people come to conferences like this, and they're looking for new special weapons and tactics to go out there and put in their BBS process. And you know how some of those things can be viewed: "Here comes more cops out there with some special weapons and tactics."

I'm encouraging you to look at the other way you can pronounce SWOT, and go out there and – this is something that can be done pretty easily, just as a committee exercise. Get together and try to identify "What are the strengths of this process? What are the weaknesses?" These are the things that we look for when we audit processes. When we're called in to look for areas to improve, we usually categorize them by: "What are the strengths that the process has?", "What are the things that are doing really, really well?", "What are they doing that they need to build off of, and that they need to leverage?"

There's going to be a lot of really good things that have come out of your initiative. What do people like?

What do they find valuable about the process? Those could fall into the strengths. Over on the right there, it says 'weaknesses'. What are the things that you really need to understand about your process that are the weaknesses? What are the things that perhaps you maybe should stop doing as it relates? What are the things that – the strategies that you should exit from?

You could also categorize by the opportunities that you have to further improve and prioritize those things. And the last thing – And again, this could be done pretty quickly as a committee exercise, just by going through and listing those out. But again, talk to the culture, talk to other people at the site, talk to a sampling of some of the managers there, some of the other observers, some of the other – your fellow employees out there. Talk to those guys and see how they would categorize some of the stuff.

And the last thing is, "What are the threats?" What happens if we have a really supportive individual at the site leave? What happens if we just got word that our site's gonna increase production by 20 percent next year? Some of the best sites anticipate that challenges are always going to be there, and the better you can use your data to respond to those challenges before they actually become, you're certainly gonna be better off.

Several of you here, you have a lot of planned activities. I'm not sure which one of the stations, but one of the nuclear facilities that's here, I understand that you increase the amount of observations during your scheduled outage because the risk level increases significantly, and you plan for that every single year. Those are the things you have to look at and say that if things are running smoothly, it's essentially that "what if?" factor. What if we encounter this? What if this goes wrong?

All I'm encouraging you here is that you need to be auditing your process at least every year. There's a lot of things that you can measure against, but continue to talk to people throughout the organization, and let them define as what's successful. Continue to do a Pareto analysis if you have accident data since you started. Continue to Pareto analyze your data and say, "Are we still focusing on the right things?" Look at your observation data and determine, "Are we still focusing on the right things?" Do you see a lot of new things that are coming up on the additional comments from the workers and the observers? Maybe that will tell you that you need to modify your focus.

We started putting this stuff together and said, "Okay, how do we transform some of these things into action?" What we first want to do is list it in the here-and-now. List all those strengths that exist – that you believe exist now to the sites. Then in turn, turn around and say, "Well what are all the weaknesses that we may have with this process? What might be? What are all the opportunities that exist in the future?" Those opportunities are also potential strengths to the sites. But also, on the other side, on the other side of that four-quadrant there, list out all the things that could possibly threaten the process. Then start going out there and at least try to create an action plan for this. Create some follow-up to say, "Okay, we identified those threats. What can we do to make sure that if we have our great safety person, our great Plant Manager that supports this, our great Operations Manager that supports this, what happens when that individual leaves?"

And certainly, if you have those great support mechanisms in site, you don't want them to leave. And maybe I'm encouraging you to be a little bit pessimistic, but just anticipate that some of those things that are really working well for the site could potentially be pulled away, so you want to try to prepare for those

things. But after you go out there and you start implementing some of that, go out and measure the impact. Has it made a difference? If you try to modify something, if you change your strategy, does it help people be safer? Does it increase the 'percent safe'?

And the last thing is that we want you to at least consider that the strengths need to be maintained and at least leveraged. We want to look at the weaknesses and try to say, "Can we stop those things that are weaknesses of the process?" Maybe in how the data's being used, or perhaps how the data's not being used? But can we address those? The opportunities need to be prioritized, and the threats need to be minimized.

Continue to look at it this way. And I don't mean to say that you have to do a fancy SWOT analysis, or you have to do value stream mapping. Those are just two approaches that we use as consultants that we try to at least encourage you to consider. If you're at least talking to the people year after year, you're going to find out a lot of these things. Just do whatever you can to write them down in a way that will help you better develop action plans. Most companies are in a business to sell some sort of product. If you have somebody in the marketing department, they can really help you. Utilize the existing infrastructure by perhaps using somebody maybe in the marketing department. Maybe there's somebody there that can help you walk through what a SWOT analysis is."

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.