



Ready, aim, fire

Most organizations apply the appropriate amount of resources to improve safety. There's not the need to do more, but the need to be better focused. What one thing, if focused on, would create the most value? What specific type of injury, if prevented, would most improve safety performance? What one piece of equipment, condition or behavior, if improved, would make the biggest difference? What one belief, if made common and shared by everyone, would be transformative for the safety culture? Do you carefully aim before firing off efforts to improve safety? Or do you fall into the "ready, fire" approaches seen so often with new safety programs, policies or commands? Is your focus a shotgun or a laser?

In his 1978 book "See You at the Top," the late American author, salesman and motivational speaker Zig Ziglar wrote, "I don't care how much power, brilliance or energy you have; if you don't harness it and focus it on a specific target, and hold it there, you're never going to accomplish as much as your ability warrants." Safety

is a big area of responsibility. Like eating an elephant, you conquer your problems one (bite) at a time. You can't take on everything at once, and even with stated unquestionable support from senior leaders, no one has an unlimited budget or resources. You have to be focused and strategic.

Strategy is making choices — small bets — to determine how to create sustainable value. Being strategic is not just deciding what to do, but also deciding what not to do or what to stop doing if it is distracting, demotivating, no longer adding value, or creating a false sense of security or accomplishment. All good strategy begins with a hypothesis — where you think you should focus, what you think would be game-changing or add value — to test against data. Should you go in the direction of the hypothesis, or did you discover that something else would be of greater value? How data-focused vs. opinion-focused are your safety efforts? Are your decisions based on statistical trends or are they knee-jerk

reactions to singular, one-off events?

In business, a strategy is necessary to capture the attention of customers, pull attention away from competitors, grow market share and/or create value for shareholders. Inside the organization, a strategy is necessary to grow the awareness of customers and consumers about the safety efforts and create the perception that what is being done to improve safety is of value. Therein lies one of the greatest challenges facing those leading safety efforts: What we do has to be of value and must be seen as valuable. Otherwise, a culture of "have to" vs. "want to" results.

To find your focus and support for the needed area of concentration, consider what data, both leading and lagging, are available to you: injury data, risk exposure data, behavioral observations, etc. Do you have more events or greater exposure on certain times of the day, days of the week, routine vs. non-routine tasks, or specific tenure of employment or tenure in the role? With employees, contractors or visitors? What about cul-

tural data? Have you completed perception surveys or other surveys? Do your employees believe and know what you want them to believe and know? Have you led discussions with a sampling of your organization to understand the concerns or suggestions from the different levels of the population?

When possible, data — not opinions — should drive your decisions. Moreover, involving others in the collection of the data generally leads to greater support for decisions about how best to move forward and where to focus.

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