



LONG-TERM  
VIABILITY AND  
SUSTAINABILITY  
OF THE BBS  
PROCESS IS AN  
AFTERTHOUGHT  
TO MANY  
PROGRAMS.

## THE BS ABOUT BBS

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**S**aying you know about BBS (behavior-based safety) because you have been at a site that tried it is like saying you know about Germans because you once met one. The range of options available to address safety-related workplace behaviors is vastly broader than any one methodology. There also is a lot of misunderstanding about the original intentions of BBS and how it resulted in blaming workers and failed to reduce serious injuries and fatalities (SIFs) at the same rate it reduced minor accidents. Some of these misconceptions are driven by early developers of these specific BBS methodologies who tend to talk about what they intended to do rather than what they actually did.

I am reminded of this basic misconception every time someone tells me they believe or don't believe in BBS, they like or don't like BBS, or that BBS works or doesn't work. All of these assertions assume that BBS is one thing that is always done the same way. If this were true then so would be the assertions. No set off-the-shelf program fits every organization and every site. But even the mainstream of BBS has significant variations in how it is done. That said, most people only know one of these programs and tend to assume all the rest are basically the same.

A recent prospective client pointed out that another firm was providing more hours of training for a little lower fee, as if quantity was the only issue and that longer training must be better than shorter training. I asked a corporate safety VP recently what he thought the main difference was between BBS providers, and he answered, "Price!"

It logically follows that thinking all BBS processes are alike would lead to thinking that the methodologies used would be likewise similar. If this were true, all BBS processes would have similar implementation strategies, sponsorship, defined management support, governance, behavioral checklists, observation techniques, behavior-modification models, KPIs, utilization of observation data and long-term sustainability mechanisms. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Implementation models range from fully supported consultant models to internal-consultant

models to train-the-trainer models to do-it-yourself models. Some BBS implementations have full-time sponsors, some have sponsorship as another task for an organizational leader, and some have worker sponsorship or no sponsor at all. Some BBS models ask managers to provide specific support and others ask managers to leave the process alone and let workers run it. Some have a steering team or committee and others have a single point-of-accountability. Some even have full-time



team leaders or members who leave their regular jobs for a time to focus solely on the BBS process.

Some BBS checklists have at-risk behaviors that need to be stopped (extinguished). Other checklists have precautionary behaviors that need to be encouraged to become more regular. Some checklists are extensive with dozens of behaviors, and others are as short as one or two behaviors at a time.

Some sites have supervisors and/or managers perform observations, and other sites strictly forbid that and have only peer-to-peer observations. Some blanket observations to everyone routinely, and others have sampling strategies or rotating areas to be blitzed with observations. Some perform the same number of observations forever (or try to), while others decrease observation frequency as behaviors become more routine and habitual. Some train every worker to be an observer and ask each to perform an assigned number of observations per month. Others train everyone but only ask a certain number to actively observe, sometimes rotating observation assignments among months of the year and/or areas of the workplace. Other BBS processes utilize only a very few, highly-trained observers to perform all observations focusing on quality.