

Step 1 of a Safety Excellence Strategy

Most workers I have interviewed over the years are clear on the organization's strategies for basic safety. But that doesn't mean the company has a well-defined safety strategy.



If you are suffering from the delusion that you can dictate or micromanage safety, cure yourself.

Almost everyone can recite some version of "...going home with all your fingers and toes..." and can describe safety meetings, training events and the availability of PPE as being elements of a basic safety strategy. However, when you ask, "How are you going to get better (or excellent) in safety?" the answer usually is more of the same.

I confess that this is at least partly because it sounds like a really dumb question with an obvious answer. The sad truth is, we often uncover that most companies really have no well-defined safety excellence strategy, and the few that do have kept it a secret from the work force.

If you truly desire a higher level of excellence in your organization's safety performance, let me suggest the following points to help you begin by developing clarity in your safety-excellence strategy. Remember, it is important to develop these features and essential to communicate them to the work force.

Structure – Your organization needs to be structured for excellence. This means safety committees or teams must have the right membership, representation, training and resources to help you achieve excellence. If your current safety

committee doesn't have the right people who represent the work force, know what they are doing and have the resources to do their job, fix it. If workers can't name their representative on the team, communicate more, or in different ways.

If the members need training to hold effective meetings, analyze data or solve problems, bring the training to them or send them to it. If you still are suffering from the delusion that you can dictate or micromanage your way to safety excellence, cure yourself. You must have the right structure to foster high levels of participation and ownership among the work force as well as give your management team a regular dose of workplace reality in their safety decisions. A good structure can help you with these issues.

Definitions – I know you might flinch when I suggest an official definition for such basic terms as safety, accidents, near misses, conditions and precautions, but the truth is that most organizations haven't aligned everyone to the same page in safety. A large cause of this is not having a page!

When we assess organizational safety cultures and find that no two people define these basic terms the same way, is it any wonder that safety efforts lack focus? If you already have official organizational definitions of these basic terms, publicize and communicate them until everyone can recite them back to you. If you don't, consider involving workers in developing them, then communicate them until everyone knows them by heart. Remember what Deming said: "People support what they help create."

Path Map – It is human nature that, when we feel lost, we try and retrace our steps to something familiar to find our way again. This is as equally true of an organizational journey toward safety excellence as it is of a hike in the woods.

When you begin to move the organization out of familiar territory, you risk employees feeling lost and wondering if they are on course or not. You can avoid this by accurately mapping the journey and making sure everyone has a map. Of course, it helps to do some pre-trip planning as well, in which you meet with everyone and spell out the course to be taken and the rationale for the journey. People who know why, as well as what, tend to support efforts more strongly and intelligently. Mapping out the steps to be taken and the intermediate destinations you will reach along the way will help everyone avoid feeling lost, as well as

to accurately measure the progress toward the desired final destination.

Focus – Once you have a map, you can focus the organization on each step. Think of focused attention and activity as a magnifying glass focusing the sun's rays to start

but most need to work smarter, not harder. If you think, "easier said than done," remember that smarter often means better focused. It is smarter to eat an elephant one bite at a time, rather than attempting to swallow the whole thing at once. So map your

Most organizations need to work smarter, not harder, at safety.

a fire. When the entire organization aligns its thinking and action on a specific target, it can start a fire of its own kind. Organizations expend tremendous amounts of effort, often in disjointed efforts that can produce so few results. Aligning those efforts with the same amount of energy can make it much more powerful.

Most organizations work hard enough to be excellent in safety,

journey and focus on each step of the journey until you have success. Celebrate or recognize the success, then progress your focus to the next step. Part of the power of focus lies in the ability of success to motivate people. When people see visual progress toward their goals, their motivation increases and progress happens more quickly. Recent research suggests that this is one of the strongest



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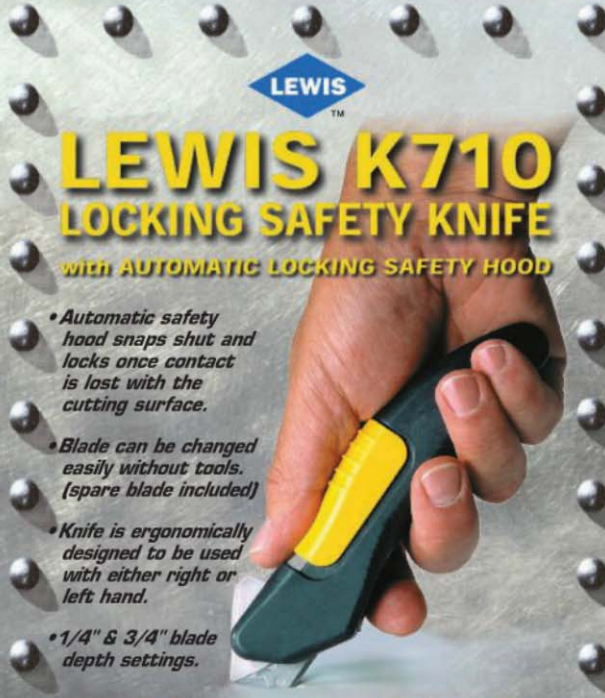
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motivators.

Marketing – Yes, I said marketing! You need to sell your safety excellence strategy to your people. I know, everyone understands the importance of safety and no one wants

to get hurt, but most people also believe in “good enough” and don’t feel especially at-risk with your current safety program.

If you are going to “sell” them on a program to get from good to great in safety (and you NEED to do so), they are going to want to know what’s in it for them and for the organization. They will need to feel pride in their efforts and have an expectation for great success and worthwhile results. The old, tired ideas of “buy-in” and “participation” will get you “good,” but “great” requires more. The idea of selling safety is a little new and can feel awkward at first, but it is a necessary step to reaching true excellence. Again, if you think you can dictate or micromanage excellence, get over it!

Safety excellence may be the ultimate strategic advantage. It is achievable and

worthwhile. It requires an organizational strategy to reach the goal and the first part of that strategy should be to reach “clarity.” With clarity, the direction forward becomes clear! **EHS**

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