Holistic? Behavior Based? Forget What You Call it, Here's What Works!

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Introduction

A key question in the minds of most safety professionals and managers/supervisors in organizations today seems to be "how do we insure that the men and women that work in our company are integrating safety, health, and environmental excellence into their daily routine?" For safety, health, and responsible treatment of the environment to become integral to your organizational culture, each of these elements must be viewed as essential to the productivity process. Safety, health, and the environment must be on par with quality, production, cost management, an so on. Everyone must recognize their responsibility and accountability for the well being of one another and the world we live in. Critical to achieving this objective is leadership's commitment to choose those actions that will demonstrate a concern for the person and their safety and health, as well as the environment we all live in.

Even though people do not want to get hurt, they sometimes either, deliberately or non-deliberately, behave in an unsafe manner. These actions may result in an accident, injury, or environmental incident. Positive or negative circumstances during times of personal or business change can be such a distracting influence such that incident rates can rise.

Internal and external safety professionals and consultants today are often in bantering conversations about what methodologies are most effective to improve a safety culture, as well as influence and change the unsafe attitudes and behaviors of the men and women that work there. Given the various theories and approaches that are being implemented, along with assertions on which are most effective in producing short- and long-term results, many people are confused by the academic terms, phrases, and claims that are used and made by all these people. What should we call it? Do we address the attitudes and thinking that underlies the behaviors first, or do we address behaviors directly first? Do we work with line employees, or do we work with management? Do we set up observation teams to give others feedback, or train our supervisors?

From Our Experience, We Say Do All of It!
The root causes of most unsafe behaviors and/or incidents result from either a loss of focus or attention on whatever activity one is doing or from counterproductive attitudes, beliefs, and

values, which influence the individual to place other priorities first, such as time, comfort, convenience, money, pride, and so forth. From past experience, individuals can also develop a false sense of security regarding their ability to control or protect themselves as they carry out their work. Incidents or injuries can occur to an individual as a result of their own awareness, attitudes and behaviors or the awareness, attitudes and behaviors of other people. When corporate and site leadership place primary emphasis on production goals and profits, many employees all at levels will knowingly take short cuts to achieve these objectives.

There are many influences on all levels of employees from a variety of sources within and without their work environment: management, co-workers, upbringing, families, and so on, which shape our personality, values, thinking, and behaviors. These influences can shape both safe and unsafe attitudes and behaviors, on and off the job. Risk taking has always been a part of our culture where statutes are built to those persons who took the greatest risks for personal or social benefit.

Getting caught up in which is the "right" approach or the "right" theory, method, or terms, can end up being a waste of time and energy (as well as creating confusion). Do yourself a favor, forget what you call it! If the process improves your safety, health, and environmental culture, changes the unsafe attitudes and behaviors of all levels of employees, both labor and management, addresses workplace hazards and system changes, and prevents incidents and injuries, it works!

Today's changing world of business and industry, bringing forth times of downsizing, upsizing, right-sizing, re-engineering, restructuring, and so on, present challenges for the safety, health and well-being of all levels of employees, on and off the job. For safety, health, and responsible treatment of the environment to become integral to your organizational culture, during these and/or stable times, each of these elements must be viewed as essential to the productivity process. As stated, safety, health and the environment must be on par with quality, the production process, cost management, an so on. Everyone must recognize their responsibility and accountability for the well-being of one another and the world in which we live. Critical to achieving this objective is management and labor leadership's commitment to choose those actions that will demonstrate a concern for the safety and health of each person, employee or private citizen, as well as the environment. The organization's culture must be enhanced so that safety, health, and the environment are viewed and demonstrated by all as key values and priorities. Consciously or unconsciously, times of change can transfer time, energy, focus, attention, and resources to other priorities. During "lean times," when survival issues come to the forefront, and jobs and livelihoods are at stake, safety, health, and the environment often get "put on the back burner" in favor of those other priorities that mean dollars into the company.

Each industry has it's own particular set of circumstances that can make it challenging to ensure that all employees are behaving in the safest manner possible. Many companies have permanent management, supervisory, and line personnel, while others have temporary employee populations that are growing and may be constantly changing. Many of the older, highly trained and experienced employees are being retired, and new employees or those with lesser experience are taking over their jobs and responsibilities. Training people in proper safeguards and practices when their employment is temporary may not be a top priority for some. Many companies do not consider it cost effective when their permanent or temporary employees are limited by time. With

production pressures still high on the priority list, having a "body" on the job may be the #1 issue, well-trained or not.

Another issue key to the safety, health, and well-being of employees and the community is whether corporate and site leadership's attitudes, beliefs, and thinking are aligned to provide the resources to insure that the safeguards necessary to prevent incidents of any type are in place.

Clearly, the cost of not investing in proper training and safety assurance has to be measured against the cost of investing in this area. What measures can be taken to make certain people don't hurt themselves and others, regardless of the length of their employment? Can a dollar amount be placed on safety, health, and the environment, long- or short-term, when it comes to human suffering?

We are sure the vision for all people is to be able to come to work and go home in the same or better condition than they came. To have all employees, customers, and private citizens safe, in good health, as well as keeping the environment clean, is an objective that most people can stand behind.

It is important to build a common safety, health, and environmental culture where everyone involved can work together toward achieving their vision with objectives and goals that support it. To accomplish this, it is essential to identify any barriers to achieving the vision and strategize to resolve or overcome the barriers. We encourage you to work with management and line employees to create a vision for safety, health, and environmental excellence, and to identify the barriers that could prevent them from achieving this vision.

It has been estimated by many that 96 percent or more of all accidents and injuries result from unsafe acts. From our perspective, these acts can result from management or line employees. Moreover, we have found that many safety, health, and environmental incidents resulting from equipment failure could have been prevented if timely maintenance and repairs were initiated, or if proper construction or installation had occurred in the first place.

Two types of events can occur: On one hand, individuals can easily become unconscious and unaware due to daydreaming, inattention, repetitive tasks, stress, and distractions from a variety of sources. As mentioned, pre-occupation with both personal or positive and negative organizational changes such as upsizing, increased production priorities, downsizing, re-engineering, job security, the future of the company, changes in product lines, and so on, can cause a person to lose focus and be injured. The other factor involves conscious or pre-meditated behaviors; in these instances, an individual will talk him/herself into taking short cuts, such as not following all procedures or avoiding wearing personal protective equipment (PPE). These pre-meditated unsafe behaviors tend to be supported by reasons, rationalizations, and justifications and are often based on factors such as time, comfort, and convenience.

When production schedules need to be met, often involving meeting contractual agreements with a customer or gaining a financial bonus or some other reward for achieving quotas are in play, overt and covert messages to complete work quickly can result in shortcuts and bypassing procedures. Such unsafe actions may also be overlooked by foremen and supervisors, especially where their compensation is affected as well. In companies where downsizing or fear of downsizing exists, employees have told us in interviews that they take

shortcuts to get their job done faster because they do not want to be perceived as slow. "The slow ones will be the next to be laid off."

Frequently, our safety programs plateau and systems flounder or fail because the negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of those participating in the system sabotage its functioning. Programs and systems are abandoned because people are not contributing constructively or participating at all. Quite simply, *systems don't work unless people do!* Organizational habits and changes can promote attitudes and beliefs such as, "We can't afford to spend the money or time on safety, we need to focus on production and profits." Traditional means of statistical tracking of accidents and injuries do not measure safety behaviors or ensure all levels of employees are behaving safely and are carrying out the activities that will contribute to the prevention of accidents, injuries and environmental incidents. Low statistics can cause people to become complacent and place their attention and energies elsewhere. To ensure continual improvement, constant attention and energy must be applied to safety, health, and environmental performance.

<u>You CAN change behaviors by addressing attitudes, beliefs, and the counterproductive circumstances surrounding people.</u> A holistic approach will address the entire person and entire system and structure that will support your vision for safety, health, and environmental excellence, and provide essential strategies to make necessary changes and improvements at all levels. This approach will support safe practices both on and off the job.

A holistic approach will produce lasting change in the behaviors of all levels of employees. Such an approach addresses a person on the physical, mental, and emotional levels, and improves attitudes, changes behaviors, increases trust, opens communication, fosters personal responsibility and participation with all employees, and heightens their ability to meet new challenges safely.

The typical behavior-based approach employs techniques that focus on defining behaviors and then provides periodic feedback and reinforcement of those behaviors. While we take no issue with the use of this technique as a valuable method of supporting changes in behaviors on an on-going basis as part of a larger process, by itself it has limitations. Given the complexity of human beings, one theory or method will not work with all employees.

What works most effectively is a systematic blend of techniques derived from the schools of cognitive, behavior-based, affective, and reality-based learning. Attention skills, which will enable a person to better focus on and pay attention to whatever task they are doing in the moment, will help prevent accidents and injuries that can result from distraction and resulting inattention.

Lasting behavioral change occurs when a person's values, attitudes, and beliefs are addressed directly. When people believe in the value of safety for themselves and others, they will make appropriate decisions and act safely wherever they are. All levels of employees must be included in the process.

The goals of an improvement process should be: (1) permanence of the change, and (2) generalizability of the change. People will be able to apply their learning and thinking to all situations, on or off the job.

The leadership of the company looking to produce continual improvement in safety, health, and environmental performance must identify and address the negative influences that shape the attitudes and behaviors of all levels of employees. The attitudes and behaviors of leadership must also reflect the awareness and understanding that the focus and attention on safety, health, and the environment needs to be heightened at this time, not diminished.

Essential resources for proper education, training, equipment, and resolution of safety, health, and environmental issues must be allocated. To diminish resources from this area to "save money" can be far costlier in the long run. This cost can be in dollars or in human suffering, which, as stated above, is quite difficult to put a price tag on.

Defining and tirelessly communicating desired values and commitments can ingrain safety, health, and environmental excellence as esteemed values. The attitudes and values of employees at all levels must be examined and measured against the vision for the organization. Expectations must be clarified where there is a lack of agreement. The most core expectation must be that each person exhibit responsibility for his or her own safety and health, the safety and health of Co-workers, family, the company, the community, and the environment.

To create breakthroughs in performance requires a holistic, integrated approach emphasizing the importance of the whole and inter-dependence of the parts. In other words, all levels of employees, both management and line or labor must be involved. Unsafe attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors from any source can influence people in a way that causes incidents to occur. All employees need to take responsibility for their own and others behaviors, as well as, system improvements, and be willing to intervene (be proactive) and assist any person in behaving in a safe, healthy, and environmentally sound manner.

The levels of your organization that need to be addressed in your improvement process are:

- **The self-management level**: Each person must have skills to observe and take personal responsibility to manage their own attitudes and behaviors on and off the job.
- **The peer/team support level:** People need to develop the attitude that they care about and have a responsibility to encourage and support their co-workers to be safe. Skills are needed to do this constructively.
- c. **The leadership-management, supervision, and labor level**: All levels of leadership need to be able to put aside political and business issues to create and maintain a vision and environment where everyone can come to work and work safely, regardless of external or internal circumstances.
- d. **The organizational level:** This includes the culture, norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, and commitments of the company and its employees. Safety, health, and the environment must be held as esteemed values, and the attitudes and behaviors that reflect these values must be encouraged, supported and acknowledged formally and informally.

Each level is underscored by responsibility and accountability. Total employee involvement is the most effective way to produce and accelerate positive improvement in your safety, health, and environmental process. Using the knowledge and experience of your employees to determine the best ways to improve and ensure safe work practices is one of the

best, low-cost investments of time and money that can pay off in preventing injuries, as well as keeping workers' compensation costs down.

When a person is internally motivated by the value and benefit of safety, health, and the environment for themselves, their willingness to participate and be involved in improvement efforts is greater, and resulting changes in behaviors tend to be long lasting.

External motivational strategies are most effective when used in combination with internal motivation. Safety leaders (line and management) must be skilled in coaching and counseling techniques to constructively lead and interact with all employees regarding safety, health, and environmental issues, attitudes, and behaviors. This also applies during times of organizational change. Leadership must continually convey the message that all employees must adhere to safety, health, and environmental requirements and procedures for their own well-being and the well-being of the company. Costs from injuries and incidents, both in terms of human suffering, sidelining of valuable team members, and financially, can push a company over the edge or seriously impair its viability. Fines and other penalties from regulating agencies can also contribute to making a company "unhealthy." The process we have found most effective is to:

- Assess the culture. Discover the prevailing attitudes, beliefs, and thinking of all levels of employees that influence and shape safe or unsafe behaviors. (This includes corporate and division leaders and influencers.)

- Train all employees in self-observation and self-management skills. Skills to increase awareness levels; focus and pay attention; make safe choices resulting from safe attitudes, beliefs, and thinking; work as safety teams; and willingly give and receive constructive feedback are essential.

- Train all leadership, management, supervision, and line/labor leadership in skills for effective leadership; coaching and counseling; communication; problem-solving; role modeling; and other skills to lead, manage, and support all employees in your safety, health, and environmental process.

- Implement a behavioral observation and feedback process to support the awareness, attitudes, thinking, and behaviors that people have learned for safety, health, and environmental excellence. Involve both management and line employees in safety support teams.

- Implement problem-solving processes and cross-functional teams to identify and solve safety, health, and environmental issues and concerns.

- Provide on-going support and reinforcement. Every improvement process or program, to be successful and continue, needs on-going support. Ensure that necessary resources, both human, financial, equipment, and so on, are provided and are readily available to prevent breakdowns or failure.

- Acknowledge and appreciate contribution and success. Humanize your reporting of progress and/or incidents that demonstrates a concern for people, not just the numbers!

Continual safety, health, and environmental improvement is an ongoing process, not a training program or an event. A culture shift represents permanent changes in the kinds of attitudes, values, and thinking that influence desired behaviors from all levels of employees over an extended period of time. Optimum opportunities for breakthroughs in performance occur when corporate and line or site employees, as well as other stakeholders, reflect these values and beliefs in safety, health, and environmental excellence. Accomplishing this shift requires consistent and sustained effort. A genuine value for safety, health, and the environment will continue regardless of the internal and external circumstances.

Improving attitudes and behaviors around safety, health, and the environment will result in improvements in attitudes and behaviors in all areas of productivity including, production, quality, costs, moral, creativity, and innovation. Benefits and savings from an investment in these areas can be tremendous.

Increased awareness of one's own attitudes, beliefs, thinking, and behaviors is the starting point to responsible actions that will correct personal and organizational behaviors and issues.

As was mentioned, some of the primary causes of accidents and injuries include inattention, daydreaming, and distractions. These causes cannot be stopped completely, but they can be minimized through increased awareness. Awareness is the starting point. Specific skills and actions are then necessary to help maintain focus and control over ones' actions and interactions with their environment.

Behaviors are often difficult to change in ourselves and others because of the human tendency to resist those things we don't like, disagree with, or find inconvenient. Our thinking process, attitudes, and beliefs largely dictate our positive and negative behaviors.

Addressing behaviors alone, without addressing these underlying attitudes and beliefs, will not generally produce lasting behavior change. By increasing awareness through education, training, and constructive intervention, individuals (both management and line) can discover their counterproductive attitudes and beliefs around safety, health, and the environment, and the possible negative consequences of their behaviors. When safety measures are disregarded by any level of employee and are overlooked by coworkers, unsafe behavior is implicitly condoned. Personnel may also develop a belief that other employees (line or management) don't care about their welfare when unsafe behaviors are overlooked and when resources are taken away or safety departments downsized when times are lean.

Common beliefs are: "It won't happen to me," "I know it's risky, but I don't have time to do it safely," and "We can't afford to spend the resources, both money and people, on safety at this time." These and other individual and group attitudes and beliefs will shape safe and unsafe behaviors on and off the job.

As noted, employee involvement is another key feature in safety improvement. With trimmer staffs, everyone must see themselves as a safety leader. All personnel must be empowered in pro-actively finding ways to identify and solve safety, health, and environmental problems. Sometimes employees assume the posture of a "victim" around safety and safety

improvement. They may blame the company for being too lax or other individuals for being careless or the equipment as inadequate. Some employees are like spectators at a game and passively observe; they may comment on how the game should be played, but we find that they seldom take effective action to help others be safe. This often occurs because they may have had negative interactions in the past with coworkers or with line or management leadership. Many employees need to be encouraged to participate, as well as requiring training in how to be more effective in their interpersonal interactions. Systems and structures must be created to provide an opportunity for people to be involved, identify problems and solutions, and receive feedback on progress. This is essential for continuous improvement. Effective communication between all levels of employees is key.

Lastly, your commitment and support is essential. Safety, health, and environmental leaders must be **salespeople** and **change agents**! Be clear of your vision, be educated in all aspects of what you believe is necessary to improve performance and prevent incidents, do your homework, enroll all persons from labor and management necessary for the approval, ongoing support, and success of your process! LET YOUR DEDICATION AND COMMITMENT DRIVE YOUR ACTIONS! WISHING YOU CONTINUED SUCCESS!!!

Summary

1. Almost all the problems of modern safety processes can be placed in one of three categories:

      a. Counter-productive attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors
      b. Interpersonal and team ineffectiveness
      c. Lack of needed resources and/or systemic support

2. The process that we have found works to create a breakthrough in safety performance and meet objectives and goals is:

- Perform a cultural assessment: Discover current norms, values, attitudes, beliefs, and commitments that influence or drive safe and unsafe behaviors.
- Train all employees to increase their awareness and provide skills to support and manage themselves and others to stay healthy, safe, and protect the environment.
- Train leadership-management and labor/line to evaluate, clarify Expectations, and guide other employees in safe attitudes and behaviors.
- Create management and line safety support teams to interview and support safe practice and correct unsafe conditions.
- Provide on-going reinforcement, resources, systems, and support for continual improvement.

3. Commitment is essential and ceaseless.