

Emergent Leadership: Drive Safety Excellence through Trust, Accountability, and Passion

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Introduction

According to industry expert Dr. Dan Petersen, safety incidents are the result of organizational culture. Culture is heavily influenced by leadership behavior. “In all the research and benchmarking that has been done, it is clear that [in order to create a zero incident safety culture] primary emphasis must remain on management involvement. Management is the key.” (Petersen, 8)

From his extensive experience in safety culture management, Dr. Petersen discerned six criteria for safety excellence, four of which are dependent upon leadership behavior. Executive management must be visibly committed to the zero-incident culture. Middle management must be actively involved. Front-line supervision must be focused on activities that drive safe behaviors. Employees must participate in creating the elements of the safety culture that affect them. Leaders at all levels must lead by example and create a participative environment that involves employees. To create a zero incident culture, leadership behavior must be addressed.

Leadership can be either positional, emergent, or both. Positional leaders are those who hold a leadership title, though a title alone does not make one an effective leader. An emergent leader surfaces when he/she earns the voluntary and passionate involvement of those he/she leads. They lead by example and have a strong, positive influence on those around them. Emergent leaders, positional or otherwise, are effective leaders.

To become an emergent leader and create a zero-incident culture, **TAP** into the three tenets of emergent leadership – building **T**rust, creating **A**ccountability, and leading with **P**assion.

Build Trust.

In *The Speed of Trust*, Stephen M.R. Covey presents a compelling argument that trust is the one thing that changes everything. According to Dr. Petersen, “Safety can only be achieved when both management and employees do it together, when there is confidence and trust existing between them!” In order for people to work together most effectively, they must build strong, high-trust relationships.

Trust is instinctive, unquestioning belief in and reliance on the integrity, strength, ability or surety of a person or thing. It is confident expectation of something because of good reason, definite evidence or past experience. It can be extended freely by choice or built over time. If extended freely, it must be validated over time or it will be lost. Where there is trust, there is hope for a better tomorrow. Where there is hope, there is the potential for excellence. Therefore, trust builds hope for the real possibility of safety excellence.

Trust is built or destroyed based upon the quality of communication among individuals or groups. Every time you interact with another human being, you're either improving your trust relationship with him/her or making it worse. Communication determines the quality of trust. Effective communication builds high trust and relies on three key behaviors, referred to as the DNA of Trust. (Exhibit 1)



Exhibit 1. The DNA of Trust.

Just as DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) represents the basic building blocks of life, the DNA of trust represents the basic building blocks of high-trust relationships.

First, be **dependable**. When you accept a responsibility or make a commitment, follow through. Peter Northouse in *Leadership Theory and Practice* cites a study by Bennis and Nanus (1985) finding that transformational leaders create trust by making their own positions clearly known and then standing by them. Dependability breeds loyalty over time, loyalty to one another and loyalty to the objective. It creates peace of mind and an assurance that things will get done safely and on time. Through your dependability, others will learn they can trust you to say and do the right thing.

Second, **never tell a lie**. Be honest in all your communications and always behave with integrity. People of integrity live according to sound moral principles. They are ethical, honorable, just and fair. They are open and honest in their communication and take honesty very seriously. When they say they value safety, they back it up with action. They model safety protocols, talk straight, demonstrate respect for others, create transparency in relationships and tasks, recognize safe behaviors, address unsafe behaviors, confront reality tactfully, listen before judging and keep commitments. They earn the reputation as people who strive to do the right things for the right reasons. They don't compromise safety when production and quality are on the line. They stop the work and fix the problem when safety is jeopardized. Leaders with integrity earn respect. Nothing is more powerful!

Third, acknowledge when you're wrong and **apologize** to those affected. Connors, Smith, and Hickman in *The Oz Principle, Getting Results Through Individual and Organizational Accountability*, claim that most organizations fail due to leadership error, but that many leaders will never admit that fact. When you make a mistake or treat others inappropriately, trust is weakened. If you do nothing, the trust relationship remains damaged and will erode over time. Acknowledge your error and sincerely apologize. When you humble yourself in this way, others respect you for it and want to follow.

Walter Cronkite, anchor of the CBS Evening News from 1962-1981, was often referred to as the most trusted man in America. Viewers depended on Mr. Cronkite to deliver high quality news and information every night. He was trustworthy. He was a man of sound morals and told us the truth. He demonstrated integrity. When he made an error in his broadcast, he would admit it and apologize. He was humble. Walter Cronkite understood the DNA of Trust and used it to develop one of the most successful and admired evening news broadcasts in American history.

Create Accountability

According to world-renowned author and teacher Zig Ziglar “you must inspect what you expect!” Dr. Peterson adds, “you can't get a culture of safety excellence without accountability.” The emergent leader must create a culture in which everyone accepts personal ownership for his/her role and voluntarily performs it with accuracy every day. There are four steps to creating accountability (Exhibit 2) and three moments of truth in which the leader's behavior is critical.

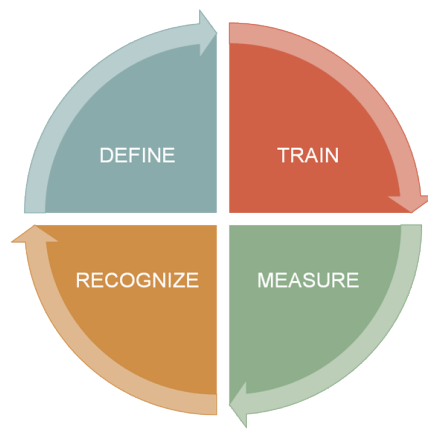


Exhibit 2. The Four Steps to Accountability.

Step 1: Define the safety activities required for each role, from the CEO to the frontline. Everyone must clearly understand what's expected of him/her in order to create the presence of safety.

Step 2: Train everyone on those activities to ensure they know how to do them right. It's a breach of integrity to expect good performance if you haven't provided proper training and preparation.

Step 3: Measure performance with periodic spot checks and conversations to ensure the activities are being performed correctly. Make sure you have the proper combination of leading and lagging indicators at each level. At the front line, measure the activities that drive safe

behavior, not safety results such as accident or incident rates. For middle managers and executives, measure activities that build the presence of safety and track safety results.

Step 4: Recognize employees when they perform their safety activities correctly, and coach to improve their performance when needed.

The three moments of truth are...

1. **At the beginning** of the relationship. Discuss what's expected and how it will be measured. The goal is to gain clarity on those two items.
2. **Every day**, as you interact with one another. The two things a leader must do on a daily basis to reinforce safety activities and behaviors are noted in Step 4 above. Positive recognition is much more powerful and effective in influencing behavior than criticism or correction. The emergent leader must administer both, but positive reinforcement should be used at a ratio of at least 7 to 1 over correction or discipline. The more you recognize good behavior, the less you have to address poor performance.
3. **The periodic summary**, or performance review. Whether formal or informal, you must regularly meet to gain clarity and make adjustments.

Most of the work of accountability occurs during item 2 above. Ironically, most leaders lack this skill, especially in the area of positive recognition. Emergent leaders, however, develop their skill to influence the behavior of others as they interact each day. There are three basic types of performers in any team: drivers, doers and draggers. The emergent leader understands the characteristics of each and how to customize his/her influence for optimum effect.

Approximately 30 percent of a team is drivers, self-starters who require very little oversight or supervision. They are extremely dependable and loyal and can be relied upon to deliver consistent high quality work. They are highly competent, enabling you to present them as role models of excellence. If they possess the desire and potential to teach others, they can become mentors and trainers. They volunteer above and beyond the expectations of their role and frequently serve on continuous improvement safety teams. They are role models of team values and standards and encourage others to emulate them. They demonstrate the DNA of Trust with others. Drivers are leaders in solving problems and resolving team conflicts and aggressively initiate positive innovations to make things better. That's why they're called "drivers." They are efficient and productive, yet humble and meek. When someone praises them for the great work they do, their typical response is "I was just doing my job." Positive reinforcement and opportunities for development are what interest drivers most. When you see their great work, let them know you appreciate it. Spend time with them to learn what they do well so you can pass it on to others. You may also want to create a think tank from your driver group to help you brainstorm continuous improvements to move the team forward.

Doers possess many of the characteristics of drivers but lack the desire or capability to teach. They are positive contributors to the team who consistently do what is expected of them. They are reliable team members who prefer to do their work and be left alone. They usually do their work well, hence the name "doer." They prefer to leave confronting disrespectful behaviors in others up to the leader or the drivers. Doers comprise about 60 percent of most team rosters and are the teammates you rely on day in and day out to produce good work. They are the core of the team and extremely valuable. Since doers usually perform well, they simply need encouragement for the good work they do and light coaching to improve.

Draggers are the actively disengaged team members who make life miserable for everyone around them. Others view them as negative contributors. They may be rude, selfish, prone to gossip and frequently complaining. Sometimes, they can masquerade as highly competent in their work but, due to their disrespectful behavior, no one on the team wants to work with them. Draggers drag the team down. In a culture of accountability and safety excellence, the definition of a great team member must include demonstrating strength in both the technical skills of the role and the interpersonal skills of team interaction. Don't overlook their disrespect of others in favor of their technical expertise. Interact with them effectively and you'll earn the respect of the drivers and the doers. The only development options for draggers are immediate performance improvement or removal from the team. Don't play around. Deal with them swiftly and fairly.

But remember, business is a game of follow the leader. As the leader goes, so goes the team. The top leader must model emergent leadership and use these techniques with the executive team, which must use them with middle managers, who must use them with supervisors, who must use them with their staff. If there is a break anywhere in the organization chart, the culture of accountability and the pursuit of zero incidents will begin to decay. It will start as a small cancer cell infecting only the area it directly impacts. Over time, the cancer will spread to other areas as more team members learn of the inconsistency in execution. If leaders at any level are allowed to continue without practicing accountability, safety excellence will remain elusive. Excellence requires consistency with accountability. Use the four steps to accountability interwoven in the three moments of truth to create a culture of safety accountability.

Lead with Passion

According to John Maxwell, "a great leaders' courage to fulfill his vision comes from passion, not position." Ken Blanchard said, "no organization will rise above the passion of its leader." Passion, defined as intense enthusiasm or devotion to a thing, has fueled history's worst atrocities and its greatest achievements. Its etymology has evolved from its original Latin meaning as the suffering of Christ on the cross to its Old French meaning as strength of feeling, capable of suffering. A person of passion has intense devotion and enthusiasm for a cause and is willing to suffer for it. Passion serves as a contagion that inspires energy for the vision of safety excellence from followers. Conveyed with knowledge and high merit, passion will lead to great things. Safety excellence demands passion fueled by virtue and knowledge ... knowledge of who you are and why you are here expressed with the best interest of those you lead in mind.

In the early 1980s, President Ronald Reagan delivered a speech on national television that demonstrated his passion for the idea of America. He was elected to office in 1980 at a time when the country was wounded from high inflation, soaring unemployment and long gas lines. The nation had recently endured a crisis in Iran, in which 52 Americans had been held hostage at the American Embassy for 444 days by Islamic students and militants. Their release immediately following Reagan's inauguration in January of 1981 brought relief to the country, but citizens were still pessimistic and struggling. Amidst this environment, Ronald Reagan spoke to the nation from the Oval Office. He appeared to speak from the heart with sincere compassion and concern for America. He expressed his optimism about America and its people, touting her as the greatest nation on the planet comprised of the most innovative and courageous people in the world. He made citizens feel good about being Americans again. It was obvious he loved his country and possessed an immense passion for all it had to offer. His passion and enthusiasm for America infected many citizens that night. President Reagan is regarded as one of the greatest presidents in American history largely because of his ability to demonstrate his passion for his country and to make citizens feel good about being a part of it. He spoke with authenticity and

conviction for a cause that was just and virtuous. His passion was contagious. America improved and entered a period of prosperity unequalled in her history. Passion in the leader is a powerful force for change.

No one would deny that Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and Dr. Martin Luther King demonstrated intense passion for their respective causes. It could be observed as a fire in their eyes ignited by powerful determination. It burned with intense enthusiasm that was visible in their facial expressions. As passion is communicated, the heart begins to pump faster than normal, blood pressure rises, and body posture stretches tall and leans forward. Voice tone and pitch convey power. Words express strength and confidence in an almost uncontrollable energy from deep within. Passion is borne in the depths of the spirit from a belief in doing something right and good that will be of benefit to others (virtue). It is as though you're involved in something that you were specifically designed and created to do. The object of your passion is aligned with your purpose in life, generating the perseverance to see it through. You believe you've been called to a virtuous journey that is destined to succeed. It's exciting, adventurous, and right. You are committed to its fruition. You are sold out to the dream and others can see it. Authenticity, truth, candor, virtue, honor and knowledge are all demonstrated elements of passion. Those behaviors, attitudes and expressions draw others to your vision.

Everyone has a seed of passion within. It must be discovered, not created. Passion emerges when you gain depth of insight into who you truly are. The key to emergent leadership is to discover your passion and deploy it fervently so that others are inspired to follow you. **MVP GOLD** will enable you to do that.

- **Mission** – what is your main purpose in life? Why are you here? Does it include keeping those you lead safe?
- **Vision** – where are you going? What is your unique vision for your life? Are you truly committed to a zero-incident culture for you and your organization?
- **Principles** – what are the non-negotiable values on which you will build your life? Is safety one of them? Do your actions and behaviors demonstrate to others that you value their safety at least equal to, if not more than, production, quality or cost?
- **Gifts** – what are your talents, skills and abilities? How are you uniquely qualified to lead a zero-incident culture?
- **Occurrences** – what life experiences have equipped you for service? What have you learned from your experiences that have uniquely prepared you to lead?
- **Loyalties** – where is your heart, your desire? What inflames your spirit? Do those loyalties really inspire you to take action to ensure that those you lead go home safely every day?
- **Disposition** – what is your personality type, your unique preferences? How do these preferences help you communicate to others that keeping them safe every day is one of your core values?

Passion is contagious. When you discover and deploy yours, it helps others do the same. Gain clarity on who you are and how you're uniquely designed to serve, and use that knowledge to lead the virtuous journey of safety excellence in your team or organization. Lead with MVP GOLD.

Build high trust in your relationships, create a culture of accountability around the work, and lead others with a passion for keeping everyone safe. When you **TAP** into the three tenets of emergent leadership, a zero-incident culture becomes inevitable. Emergent leaders make everything else better.

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