

## **Increasing our Safe Work Habits at the Beliefs Level**

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### **Introduction**

Many organizations invest significant resources to improve safety performance. Over time, some find that their efforts stagnate or do not spark the results expected. Even organizations with a history of good systems and programs can find their safety performance does not meet escalating performance expectations and goals. A common theme among these organizations is beliefs, shared by both leaders and the workforce alike, that drive a willingness to perform at-risk behaviors in day-to-day activities.

Improving safety performance can be a fight against natural human tendencies. We perform an at-risk behavior without consciousness of the risks at play or because we meet an immediate need to save time, be comfortable, or receive approval from others. These at-risk behaviors become unsafe habits over time, putting us and others at increasing risk of injury. This presentation will describe a *proven* method for improving safety performance within the fabric of an organization's culture, or "how things get done around here." Specifically, it is an approach that challenges the beliefs that lead to risk-taking behaviors and replaces them with beliefs that lead to habitually safer performance.

The "Safe Work Habits" program focuses the entire organization on establishing safe work habits as a means to reduce risk and continually reinforce a commitment to safe performance. The results can include:

- an increase in employee focus and participation;
- an increase in collaboration between the workforce and management that is positive and sustainable;
- an increase in safety commitment that reaches into our homes and communities; and
- a sustainable reduction in at-risk behaviors and the safety incidents that result.

## Background

In 2000, I worked at a petroleum refinery where significant progress had been made in reducing injuries in the workplace. Among other things, this progress had been achieved through a focus on increasing the use of proper personal protective equipment (PPE), more effective training and procedures, and the improvement of other safety program components like incident analysis.

However, after experiencing additional injuries and two significant near misses, there was a strong feeling that the pace of improvement was not fast enough.

We looked to our recent injuries and near misses for direction on what to do next. As we reviewed the incidents we recognized that improvement had been clearly made in the complex, high risk jobs. The risks we had not reduced and the injuries we were experiencing were primarily in the day-to-day activities where people were on auto-pilot. People were getting hurt doing routine tasks; a circumstance we found surprising at the time.

We had a proactive safety program. Risks were being surfaced and reduced. People were supporting each other. Safety expectations were becoming clearer. But for some reason, “being safe” was not an automatic, natural, say “instinctive,” way of acting in all situations.

We spent significant time and effort talking to our employees, trying to figure out what was on their minds and in their hearts about safety. We found that after all the focus, effort and clear progress that had been made, employees were still willing to take risks. Sometimes they felt they had to keep up with production expectations. Sometimes they acted out of a sense of machismo. Other times they underestimated the risk involved in a task they had done for years.

Today I find many companies in similar situations. They have made significant and measurable progress in their safety performance. They may even have systems and resources that are making a real difference in their safety compliance and measurable performance. And their programs, meetings, and surveys may even engage employees in a constructive way.

But what I hear, even from companies that have made notable progress, is “How do we take this to the next level?” “How do we get employees to take more ownership of their safety performance?” And “How do we do it in a way that is sustainable?” These were our questions as well.

## Our Habits

In nature, much of an animal’s survivability is built in. A turtle, for example, has built in PPE. There is never a doubt that he will be protected during whatever task he has to perform that day. Humans, on the other hand, have little built in PPE; really none that will protect us from the harsh hazards of the environments in which we work and play. We have to make the choice to wear our PPE; or stand out of the line of fire; or look behind us before we step backwards; or tie off before we work above the surface; etc, etc. We have to *choose* to act in a certain way to protect ourselves. Not already built in physically or even intellectually, safety is just not very instinctive for us human beings.

One of many examples of how unsafe we can behave is in our use of seatbelts. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Association, approximately seventeen percent of Americans were still not wearing their seatbelts in 2007. Their statistics are pretty clear that many lives could be saved each year if more people wore their seatbelts.

The good news is, I did not know anyone who wore a seat belt when I was a child in the sixties and early seventies. So change in our safe behaviors has happened. It is possible. For some reason, at some point, many people started wearing seat belts and over time it became habitual. It may have been as a result of a family member's encouragement (or demand), the annoying car lights and buzzers, or (in some states) a fear of getting a ticket. We made a *choice* to protect ourselves, and with repetition it became a habit.

We have all acquired habits in our lives by repeating a single behavior over and over. Some of these habits are good for our personal well being, and some are not.

Think about some other areas of your life for a moment. Have you been known to lift something too heavy by yourself, mow the lawn without proper footwear, stretch too far while working from the top of a ladder, run up and down stairs (maybe even carrying something) without using the banister, and \ or drive too aggressively for the conditions or while being distracted? Me too! And if you're reading this paper, there's an excellent chance that you are an individual with a firm commitment to keeping yourself and others safe!

We are all taking these kinds of risks in some way every day. Our workforce may be doing it on the job, but our management teams and administration employees are taking similar risks in their homes, yards, garages, and cabins, while they fix, clean, play, etc. We all have some bad habits and some of them have potentially severe consequences.

And that is what we found in our workplace, as well. We had reduced the big risks on the job. However, we had not effectively addressed the moment to moment decision making around daily tasks repeated thousands of times a day - the risks involved in walking, lifting, driving, using tools, working side by side with others, etc. We were conducting observations on each other and practicing pre-job planning, but we were looking right past some of our bad habits.

## **The Human Side of Safety**

We are taking risk in our lives, at work, home and play. When we take risks, there are a number of possible outcomes that could result (I like to say that these possible outcomes are "put in play"). We take a risk like going through a yellow light. The possible outcomes include - getting into a car accident that involves a fatality; getting into a car accident that involves injuries; being issued a traffic ticket; almost hitting someone and receiving an angry gesture from them; or experiencing no unpleasant outcome at all. Each of these possible outcomes is real. People experience them every day. My extended family has experienced each of these over the years, including the death of my young cousin when a driver blew through a red light. Devastating. And yet, until recently I had a tendency to blow through yellow lights when I was in a hurry (and even when I wasn't because it was a habit).

Here is the trap waiting to catch us. Most of the time when we take an at-risk behavior, nothing bad happens. Along with this nothing bad outcome, there is usually something I perceive as good that happens at the same time. I save time (as in the example of blowing a yellow light), the task seems easier, more comfortable, gets done more quickly, gets approval from others, etc. We get trapped into taking the at-risk behavior by a short term benefit, while at the same time putting some very ugly stuff (outcomes) in play.

It was with this awareness that the leadership team became motivated to further understand what drives our risk taking decision making. What we really wanted to know was “What makes people tick?”

## **The Galileo Reality Model**

Looking for a way to understand behavior that was both simple and accurate, I was fortunate enough to encounter a group of trainers and consultants who were on the cutting edge of performance improvement. They were called the Galileo Initiative, named after the sixteenth century scientist who taught us all to see the world through a different lens. The folks at Galileo offered a roadmap of human nature that seemed to explain what we were observing in the workplace. It helped us better understand “What makes people tick?”

## **It Starts with Needs**

Although the great schools of psychology use different terminology, there is essential agreement that human behaviors are driven by needs. You might remember learning about Abraham Maslow, who described a “hierarchy of needs.” From Freud to Skinner, professionals in the field are in agreement that much of what we do is an attempt to meet some basic set of needs that all of us share. Think about these needs being a circle. You’ve heard of people being “well-rounded.” What if a well-rounded individual is someone whose most basic needs are consistently being met? What would that person have?

To start with, they would have to have enough food, enough sleep, and a warm place to sleep at night. Some of our needs have to do with staying alive. A well-rounded person would have relationships – a circle of family and/or friends to depend upon and enjoy. An interesting need that people have is the need to experience variety. That well-rounded person you have in mind is probably someone with a broad range of interests. For some people its sports, for others travel. There are entire industries that exist solely because people seek adventure or a change of pace. Finally, most people, from the most primitive to the most sophisticated, have wondered at some point, what does this human experience mean anyway? It would appear that the search for something I’ll call “significance” is common to us all.

You may have other labels for these basic human needs. It’s common to think about our needs being physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. Whatever model or language you prefer, I hope we can agree that we all share some common needs.

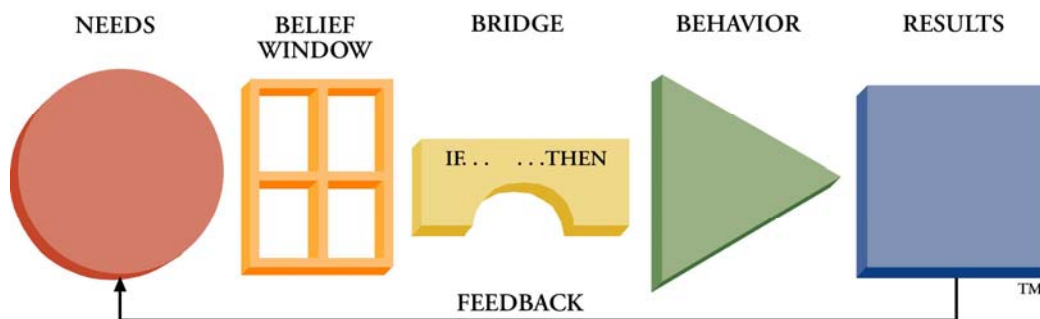
How do these basic needs affect our behavior? Consider the following statement:

**We do what we do to get what we need!**

The behaviors in which we engage to meet our needs create the results we achieve in every area of our lives – personal and organizational, positive and negative. Let’s look at that more closely.

## The Roadmap to Results

I mentioned a little earlier that my friends at the Galileo Initiative introduced me to a sort of roadmap to results. It’s called the Galileo Reality Model.



**Exhibit 1. The Galileo Reality Model**

Our roadmap begins with needs, the starting point for our behavior as we just described. Let’s walk through an example.

### Needs

Imagine that you and I are walking down a street together. Each of us needs to stay alive, get a little love, experience some variety, and feel significant. As we move along the sidewalk we see a dog coming toward us by itself, no owner in sight. It’s possible that you and I might react differently to the approach of the dog. Why would that be if we have the same set of human needs?

### Belief Window

Picture that as you read this page, you have a pane of glass in front of your face, between you and the written page. Look up, and imagine that whatever you see above the written page, you see through that same pane of glass. We’re going to call that your “Belief Window”. Each of us has one, and we see everything in the world through the window of our prior experiences and other things that have influenced us.

Consider the dog. You see it through your window. I see it through mine. And chances are very good that you and I have had different past experiences with the world of dogs. Maybe you had a dog growing up that was very much like the one coming down the street towards us. Maybe I was

once bitten by a similar dog. Same dog, same street, but we'll have very different reactions. Etched in the glass of your Belief Window, there may be the idea that dogs like this are friendly. Etched in the glass of my Belief Window is the concept that dogs like this are dangerous.

### If-Then Bridge

At this point, each of us – you and I – will cross a mental bridge. The bridge links what we believe to what we're about to do. This bridge is like any other bridge you've crossed in your life. It is a connector. In this case, it connects our beliefs with our behaviors using the concepts of "if" and "then" to form the connection. Here's how it works. "If" refers to my belief – "if dogs are friendly." "Then" refers to my behavior in the specific situation, "then I'll pet the dog". **If** dogs are dangerous, **then** I'll cross the street. This if/then connection is absolutely powerful, although it is often unconscious.

### Behavior

In an attempt to meet our needs, our behavior will always be influenced by our beliefs. You, believing that dogs are friendly, might move to meet your need for love by petting the dog. I, believing the dog might be dangerous, cross the street in an attempt to survive the encounter, meeting my need to live.

### Results

All behaviors produce results. In your case, the result may be that the dog wags his tail and seems happy to see you. In my case, I have avoided an encounter with an animal that might be dangerous.

But consider this – what *drove* our various behaviors? Remember that we do the things we do in an attempt to meet our needs for life, love, variety and significance.

### Feedback

Look back at the Reality Model. See the line that connects the results back to our needs. In your case, the need for love was nicely met in the moment the dog's tail began to wag. In my case, the need to live was met when the dog, paying attention to you, ignored me as I crossed to the opposite sidewalk.

When the results of our behaviors meet our needs, most of the time we don't particularly notice it. We just continue doing what we do and feeling pretty good. Unfortunately, this arrangement has serious negative consequences when a thing like our well-being is at stake.

Think back to what we said about a driver approaching a traffic light that turns yellow. What we are *supposed* to do is slow down and prepare to stop as the light turns red. This behavior would serve nicely the need to remain safe and live another day. What do people *actually* do? As mentioned earlier, in this and many other situations we make a choice that puts a lot of "ugly stuff" in play.

Too many of us speed up. Why? If you link back to your basic needs, perhaps you were hurrying to a meeting, "I'm so important they can't do it without me" – the need for significance. Maybe you were in a rush to get to a date – the need to give and get love. The important thing to remember is that if a behavior didn't meet at least one of our needs, we wouldn't do it. But we are complicated beings. Rarely does behavior affect or become affected by only one need at a time.

Sure I need to be safe (the need to live) as I drive, but it can often happen that my other needs – love and significance for example – can take precedence. Our needs can battle one another, causing us to make poor choices. The most problematic factor is that we most often don't make these choices *consciously*.

## Running Hard in the Wrong Direction

We all know that the only way to achieve different results is to engage in different behaviors. In fact, a popular definition of insanity is “doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.” When we resolve to change, permanently and effectively, it always entails an understanding of what we have to *start* to do that we *aren't* currently doing, or what we have to *stop* doing that we currently *are* doing. Clearly, behavior has to change.

However, it's not that simple. Concentrating on behavior almost always leads to both disappointment and ineffectiveness. Let's look at a common example. Perhaps, the single group of behaviors that have the most significant impact on our health have to do with diet and exercise. We certainly know how to find healthy food, and are well aware of the value of exercise, and yet, many of us continue to put our health in jeopardy through habitually engaging in behaviors – overeating and sitting around – that do not produce healthy results. When the stress in the feedback loop is sufficient, i.e. - it gets our attention, we resolve to change our behaviors. Usually this takes the form of a diet, or exercise program, or both. And we set off, full of energy, enthusiasm, and resolve to change our behavior.

Unfortunately, what was going to be a lifetime of new and better behavior quickly becomes a platform for self-recrimination as we see ourselves somehow helplessly slipping back into our old behaviors (habits).

You're probably just as familiar, unfortunately, with the organizational equivalent of this example. It comes to the attention of a division safety manager that employees are cutting corners to get jobs done quicker, or some similar concern. No major negative results have yet occurred in terms of injuries or downtime, but the potential is definitely there. The group is brought in on their own time for mandatory retraining, new safety posters are hung in the break room, and new disciplinary measures are communicated. For a month, everyone carefully follows the rules, but over time, the old, negligent habits resurface.

The problem in both of these cases is that we have been pouring our energy, effort and resources into the wrong solution. We are fighting, rather than working with, human nature and biology. We are running hard in the wrong direction by focusing only on our behaviors. There is a better way.

## The “AHA” Solution

Think about a time when you or someone you know was able to make a lasting change in their habits. Perhaps you quit smoking cigarettes, or learned to curb your explosive temper. On an organizational basis, maybe your company was able to get people to consistently wear all of their

personal protective equipment, or vigorously report safety-related near misses. Whenever behaviors change in a sustainable way (long enough to actually turn into new habits), it is always a product of changing beliefs.

It is absolutely essential to understand that the key to change - the “Aha!” solution – is that we need to concentrate on the beliefs from which specific behaviors spring in the first place. When we impose change in behavior without addressing the underlying belief system we are dooming ourselves to frustration and failure. But, when we understand what beliefs would be necessary to produce the desired behaviors as a logical consequence, we have taken the first steps toward lasting change in habits. We put ourselves in the position of working with a most natural brain process instead of fighting a likely-to-be losing battle against human nature.

## If-Then Safety Bridges

Understanding the If-Then Bridge in the Reality Model is so critical. It is the auto-pilot in each of us. It shapes our behaviors, which eventually become our habits. And it applies to the entirety of our lives.

Here are some common safety-related examples I have encountered across many different organizations. I provide them to stress both how the bridge works and how critical it is that we surface and change the actual beliefs operating in our organizations (and families, and ourselves).

If I Believe: “I am responsible for my own safety!”	Then I will: Think before I act – all day long.
If I Believe: “It is not worth the possible consequence to save a few minutes.”	Then I will: Go get my PPE (or the right tool, or help from a colleague, or whatever) to counter the risks before I perform a very quick task.
But –	
If I Believe: “It won’t happen to me!”	Then I will likely: Not wear my PPE; especially if I have to go get it.
If I Believe: “It is all about production around here.”	Then I will likely: Teach a bad habit to a new team member so they can get the job done more quickly.
If I Believe: “Injuries are part of the job; hey, this is a tough business!”	Then I will likely: Not report a serious near miss that others could learn from.



And finally, if as an manager \ leader in the organization—

I Believe:

“We can’t be injury free!”

Then I will:

- Not stop unsafe acts or jobs;
- Not work to make safety meetings really valued;
- Not be open to the opinions of employees who need resource and other support to counter the risks in their work environment;
- Etc.

## **It’s ALL about Beliefs**

If our beliefs are not aligned with safe behaviors, we will take risks in our tasks all day long. Talking on the phone while we drive because it’s productive, carrying something too heavy or awkward for us to carry by ourselves so we don’t have to bother someone else; doing a task without PPE because its more comfortable; cutting a corner on a procedure because it’s quicker; etc, etc, etc.

And when management recognizes that their own risk-taking - while they drive, work in the garage, work in the yard, do repairs around the house, walk around the plant, etc. - is rooted in the same thinking that their employees demonstrate in the workplace – WOW, the light starts to shine on the real opportunity to improve safety performance.

Safety improvement is, in a large part, a fight against human nature. The fight takes place at the level of beliefs. And no one in the organization is excused from the battle field.

When leaders get this point in a very personal way, at the level of their own beliefs, their leadership actions change. When they stand up and admit to their employees that they, too, are taking risks they need to avoid, they can then better address helping their employees do the same. I have seen this play out many times. It significantly changes the mood of the organization and in turn the commitment to improvement.

Once we accept that we need to change our beliefs, then we can start to focus on how to change. At the Galileo Initiative we call the how part, “Imprinting”.

## **Imprinting, the Natural Process for Sustainable Change**

We are each born with billions of individual brain cells, or neurons, that have an almost infinite ability to connect with each other to form automatic pathways in our brains. Some of the connections are built in, before we are born. Some connections are reflections of the experiences we have in life. The thought patterns in your brain, and the behavior and results they produce are a product of both nature and nurture. The neural connections that allow us to learn to speak are a good example. You’re hard-wired to acquire language – that came as part of the package that was you. Whether you learned to speak English, Spanish or Urdu was a product of your life

experience. The process of creating these neural connections is what neurobiologists call, “imprinting.”

Imprinting takes place in two primary ways:

- **Significant emotional experience:** This kind of imprinting can be positive or negative. Ask anyone who has been married more than 20 years what was the weather like on your wedding day? They will most likely know. It’s a solid memory for them. But ask them what the weather was a week before their wedding and, unless the week before was extraordinary for some reason, they probably won’t recall.
- **Repeated experience:** If you hear it, see it, or read it enough times, a belief can become embedded in your brain. Can you recite the Pledge of Allegiance? Try it. Many people can who haven’t thought about it since grade school. The words are still there in the brain.

Of the two major ways we imprint, we have more control over repeated experience. In changing employees’ beliefs about safety this can really be used to our advantage. Knowing our thoughts are in part a product of our experiences, we can focus on orchestrating specific experiences in order to change our programming. We can design experiences to influence the thought patterns we need to change in order to produce the results we need to produce. To do this, we have to pause and consider, what do I believe and how will it affect what I’m about to do? This is not something many of us do naturally.

Every time a person thinks, talks, or does something, they are imprinting. Here in lies the key to changing our beliefs.

Repetition of a thought or behavior creates dominant pathways in the brain. A key word here is “dominant”. We may have another idea or wish, but when it comes to automatic pilot, we’ll always go with the dominant pathway. The key, then, is to create new dominance in the areas we want and need to change.

Fill in the blank in the phrase: Practice makes \_\_\_\_\_. Did you say “Perfect?” Most people do. It’s a common saying. But is it true? Do you golf? If so, do you practice? Are you perfect? Me neither. Practice does not necessarily make you even “better.” What then does practice make? In real life the answer is: Permanent. Practice makes Permanent. The more we can get ourselves and others to practice in line with the right beliefs, the more natural, or instinctive, the right behaviors will become.

We can deliberately apply imprinting techniques to improve safe work habits at the level of automatic pilot. Using repetition of thinking, talking and doing, we can help employees change their automatic responses (their If-Then Bridges). There is a toolkit of imprinting methods at our disposal that we can summarize by the following categories:

- **Self-talk:** If we repeat something to ourselves, verbally or not, positive or negative, it creates a dominant pathway in our brains. So we have to find ways to tell ourselves the right messages.

- **Conversation:** When we talk and listen to others we are imprinting thoughts in our minds as well as theirs. Getting people to describe experiences and share ideas is a way to reprogram their beliefs and the beliefs of those around them.
- **Reading:** The act of reading causes information to be imprinted in our brains. To create dominant pathways, though, the reading must be repeated. Signs reminding employees to wear PPE or follow procedures are examples of this principle at work.
- **Writing:** Writing is a powerful imprinter because it uses both muscle memory and thought. Having workers keep safety logs, for example, creates dominant thought patterns about safe procedures.
- **Kinetics \ Behavior:** Doing something a certain way imprints over time. We retain memory in our muscles. Knowing how to turn on the windshield wipers in your car without looking is a good example of how this works. Probably the most obvious approach, if we can do the safe act over and over it will become a safe habit. And if we are doing it with some awareness of the underlying beliefs involved, similar behaviors will show up in countless other ways.

When it comes to influencing groups of people, we have additional opportunities and methods for imprinting that we can summarize in the following categories:

- **Policy:** What is written (or not written) in an employee manual or other official policy statement influences employee beliefs. Employees will perceive how much policies align with and support organizational goals, or not. They will assess how much policies hamper their effectiveness or contradict other message they hear.
- **Practice:** This refers to the ways in which people actually apply the Policies (or not!). An excellent example of this is driving the speed limit. We have an official policy but many people ignore it. What practices in our organization advance safety? What practices discourage it? Employees are being constantly imprinted by what they see people doing around organization.
- **Strategy:** The programs and approaches organizations decide to pursue send a message. Employees' thinking is influenced by the strategic choices management makes.
- **Signage and décor:** Anything the eye sees is recorded on the brain. To what degree the facility is maintained and what messages are visible on the signs, bulletin boards, etc. around the plant send messages to employees.
- **Internal communication:** All hands meetings, newsletters, group emails are all "spotlight" events. Employees learn from what is focused on and what is left out of communication efforts. They also are influenced by how effectively lines of communication are used.
- **Rumor mill:** Never underestimate the power of the rumor mill and its effect on morale and productivity. People are influenced by what they hear over and over. And the rumor mill is usually quicker and more frequent than more formal lines of communication.

- **Leadership Behaviors:** The day-to-day actions of leaders will always serve to either underline or undermine all the factors listed above it. Leadership behaviors are the number one means of imprinting organizations. Its happening today, whether the leaders are aware of it or not. The essential question is, “Are leaders imprinting the beliefs they want to imprint?”

Occasionally, people in leadership positions shy away from acknowledging their impact on employees and associates. Sometimes they say that they don’t want to imprint other people or that the idea of imprinting associates is “manipulative.” It is a fact that leadership behavior imprints, whether we intend for it to or not. This is why it is so critical that leaders act with intention and clear goals in mind; employees are watching, learning, and following.

## Imprinting Strategies and Tools

Our approach to changing beliefs in order to change behaviors, and eventually habits, in order to change results is focused on getting people to think, talk, and do differently. We design activities, provide tools, assign responsibilities, etc. to ensure we are imprinting the beliefs necessary for success. This approach applies regardless of the change in results we are looking for; The Galileo Initiative helps companies change their culture around teamwork, communication, diversity, and leadership.

When activities and tools for individuals are reinforced by deliberate messages and examples from leaders all across the organization, belief change can happen quicker than you might imagine.

Some examples of strategies we use to imprint new beliefs include the following:

- **Training:** Training, when well designed and delivered, can be a real spring board to imprinting new beliefs. In the Safe Work Habits workshops we look to educate participants on the principles in a way that allows us to attain an honest read on the current thinking patterns. All levels of the organization are led through activities to surface, understand and combat beliefs not aligned with safety excellence.
- **Imprinting Tools:** Anytime we can get an employee to think, talk, or do in line with a safe belief it’s a good thing. We have designed, and often tailor, tools of all kinds to get employees to think about a task, talk about what they are learning, or do something they wouldn’t necessarily do. Using logs, calendars, pocket cards, and a variety of other tools, we put things in place that can be easily shared and celebrated.
- **Leadership Responsibilities:** There are many things a leader can do to positively effect safety in the workplace. The single most important thing, though, for anyone in a leadership role is modeling safe work habits in their own life. This goes far beyond “leading by example” by wearing PPE. Leaders that are proactive, inquisitive, action-oriented and open-minded about safety across their lives send very strong messages to their workforces. We have a number of ways to set leaders up for success in these areas.

- **Integrated with Existing Programs:** Imprinting efforts do not usually replace existing programs and practices. Rather, they are designed into existing activities as much as possible. Finding ways to imprint deliberate beliefs through the existing efforts is key to success because it does not add more work for everyone. In this day of overflowing plates (or “turkey platters” as a class participant once pointed out), it’s important not to just keep adding more work.

## Results

The results we have seen from belief-based safety focus have followed a similar pattern.

The first indications of progress are at a very personal level. When the training is done well, there is an almost immediate increase in **humility**. Employees start to share more openly their individual at-risk habits and find some common ground with each other. Leaders who are willing to share their own stories can significantly fuel this openness. We also see an increase in **personal accountability**. Employees start to focus on their part of being safe rather than expecting others to make them or keep them safe. They become proactive, not because they *have to* but because they *understand* what it takes to be safe at a much deeper level. They start to take responsibility for their own beliefs and the behaviors that follow.

Next there is an increase in **positive energy** toward safety. I have observed dramatic improvements in management \ workforce relations as both parties stop pointing to the other as the problem and start taking personal accountability for their role in the partnership. This energy also shows up in an increase in story telling and recognition of individual and team progress.

With the imprinting idea in hand, and tools to help, employees understand the need to talk about what is going on. They start to *look* for stories to share and lessons to learn from their experiences. At its best, employees begin to make a habit of finding, sharing, and listening to stories of safety (good and bad) from work and home alike. This can get contagious over time, even with the most resistant employees, and can change the team’s dynamics.

Positive attitudes build even further as leaders increase their practice of catching people doing things right. For some organizations, this is a very different approach to managing and communicating with the workforce, and one that carries with it a boost in employee morale. Thanks to the methods and tools we use to drive imprinting, there are plenty of opportunities to recognize people who are contributing to a safer workplace. Some organizations accumulated and share stories of success from both employees and managers to celebrate progress. It’s quite exciting to hear the many things going on as people shift their beliefs and start acting accordingly. Employees will express a level of **pride** as a result of the stories they share and from being recognized by others for a job well done.

As the focus and intensity are maintained, progress will without doubt show up in the **reduction of at-risk behaviors**. This will begin with the reduction of specific at-risk behaviors. Often they are behaviors targeted by teams and are easy to discuss and observe. But as employee beliefs change, the reduction of at-risk behaviors expands beyond what is planned, tracked, and discussed. Often we hear statements like “I am more conscious of what I am doing these days.” A

comment like that is a really good sign that we are headed toward making safety far more habitual.

When the safety **efforts** start to **show up at home**, I know change is taking place at the beliefs level. I have heard so many stories of how employees, bursting with pride, have changed their habits, and the habits of their families and friends, at home. This can be an emotional experience for some. It is always moving for me to hear these stories of real people leading the charge.

In time, the daily reduction in at risk-behaviors driven by changing beliefs results in **reduced incidents and injury rates**. I worked with a team of 50 employees that was about to lose its contract with their customer because of a poor safety record. After applying the Safe Work Habits approach they went 2 years without an injury. I worked with a complex industrial facility of 700 people that is now approaching a full year without an injury for the second time in three years. I am currently working with an organization of about 70 employees that went from 7 injuries in a year to a year without a single injury.

The companies that I have seen applying belief-based change were working on a number of fronts to support the safety improvement effort. As is the case for many companies, a focus on hiring practices, training, job planning, increased procedure use, etc. were often some part of the improvement effort. But when a company is also using the Reality Model to make sure the right beliefs are being imprinted along with these programs, sustainable progress is more likely. Without the right beliefs – no program packs the expected punch. With the right beliefs – the impact can be greater than you can imagine.

## In Conclusion

We have designed and executed Safe Work Habit efforts in a variety of situations; different industries, company sizes, performance levels, and maturity of safety cultures. The common denominator is always people. We all share some very common beliefs that keep us from being truly safe. By applying the Reality Model and Imprinting Strategies along side many of the efforts already underway, levels of sustainable improvement can be achieved.

I have personally applied these principles to myself in some personal areas needing behavior change. I have also worked through these principles with the new teenage driver in our house. Today, I am basking in the joy of new results in my life achieved from the shift of personal beliefs that did not serve me well in the past. It was not easy to take responsibility for the results in my life that I did not like and admit the behaviors and beliefs that lead me to these results. But by imprinting new beliefs, my life has been transformed in some incredible ways.

There is no doubt these tools work. Whether the focus is safety or our personal life, the results that can be achieved are life changing!