

## **How to Build a World-Class Manufacturing Capability: Creating a Workplace Free of Illness and Injury Must Start at the Top**

**Scott Gaddis**  
**Corporate Manager, Global Occupational Safety and Health**  
**Kimberly-Clark Professional**  
**Roswell, Georgia**

In a manufacturing environment, a company's greatest asset is its workers, and protecting those workers from illnesses or workplace injuries is critical to success. Operating an injury-free facility is no longer a dream. In many workplaces, it has become a reality – and not just for a year, but for several years running. Creating a workplace that is free of illness and injury begins with one crucial decision: making safety a core value. Better yet, it should be an organization's chief value.

At Kimberly-Clark Professional our safety vision calls for an absolute belief that every employee can create and maintain a workplace free of illness and injury. That vision has paid off with a current total incident rate of 0.7 versus 4.2 in 1996 and a current Severity Index Rate of 32.0 compared to 345.0 a decade ago. In 2005 and 2006 several of our manufacturing sites and a staff team achieved one year of work without injury. In fact, our best-in-class facility in Corinth, Miss., has sustained this level of performance for more than four years and is expected to exceed 1.5 million hours without a single injury or illness in 2007.

These results can be attributed to a culture that embraces safety and empowers employees to maintain a commitment to safety in everything they do. The key to this success is establishing a safety-based culture that starts at the top. In the past, manufacturers have been told that safety is a line-driven activity that must first be implemented at the bottom of an organization and then work its way to the top. But the reverse is true. Safety must *start* with an organization's senior management team. Leadership must demonstrate an active commitment to safety and promote that commitment with a passion, down and through the entire organization. The very best leaders deliver safety values with true passion and understand that their employees are responsible for their company's success. To improve the safety culture of an organization, the following should occur:

- The safety process must touch every person in the organization.
- Safety must be a permanent agenda item, discussed at the start of every meeting.

- Leaders must be held accountable for safety performance.
- Safety must be the operational fabric of a facility, not a separate function.
- Safety must be integral to every business activity.

OSHA concurs with this assessment stating that “the best Safety and Health Programs involve every level of the organization, instilling a safety culture that reduces accidents for workers and improves the bottom line for managers,” concluding that “when safety and health are part of the organization and a way of life, everyone wins.”

Under this approach “safety departments” do not exist. Safety professionals still have a vitally important role, but it shifts to a resource function that empowers others through capability development, coaching and mentoring. The very best safety programs are owned at the manufacturing line, utilizing production-level employees on teams to develop and implement the safety processes. Safety must also be aligned with all other business functions to ensure that it receives the resources and attention that it deserves.

To be successful, organizations should create career paths that turn employees into safety leaders by making sure that everyone is highly trained and motivated not just to *succeed*, but to *exceed* expectations. Workers should be mentored, to help them contribute to the safety process. The organization should also develop an environment and culture that supports the belief that every employee can create and maintain a workplace free of illness and injury. The result of this investment will be establishing, within workers, a sense of ownership of the safety process and a shift within the organization from an independent to an interdependent culture. This can help drive employees to eliminate unsafe behaviors and conditions and to focus on eliminating injuries entirely, rather than just meeting regulatory requirements.

According to OSHA, when a company’s safety culture is strong, “everyone feels responsible for safety and pursues it on a daily basis; employees go beyond ‘the call of duty’ to identify unsafe conditions and behaviors, and intervene to correct them.”

With this in mind, consider posting the following safety principles throughout your facility to remind employees of the importance your organization places on achieving its safety goals:

- Any person can and must confront unsafe behaviors and/or conditions. No one is authorized to disregard such a warning.
- No one is expected to perform any function or accept any direction that they believe is unsafe to themselves or others, or creates an unsafe situation, regardless of who directs such an action.
- Anyone who feels that a process is unsafe will shut down that process and work with appropriate team members to create a safe situation.

## **A Safety Process Model**

Adhering to a simple process model is another highly effective component of an overall strategy for improving the safety of a manufacturing facility. The model below focuses on four aspects of safety:

- Leadership – As stated earlier, leadership is key. Leaders must lead and support the safety process wholeheartedly. They must communicate the importance of safety as well as the value and respect they have for the people who work for them. In addition, facility managers should meet regularly with staff to review safety events and issues, track progress and establish future goals, teach safety training sessions and participate in mentoring.
- Environment – It's essential to ensure that the overall environment is safe, equipment is properly cared for, operating practices are adhered to and engineering standards are followed. To accomplish this, conduct a design safety review of all equipment from inception and a full ergonomic review before installation and bi-annually after that. Establish extensive inspection programs to ensure compliance and be on the lookout for new technologies to reduce risk. Always ask yourself what you can do to make the physical workplace safer and reduce risk.
- Personnel – Investing in people is paramount to success. The best organizations will first seek to hire the right people and then develop their capabilities and skill sets. Be sure to include questions about safety as part of the hiring process, to gain an understanding of a prospective employee's knowledge of safety and to communicate your company's commitment to safety. Also require safety/loss control training for all manufacturing employees, assign mentors to new and transferred employees and provide annual written safety valuations for all workers.
- Behavior and Expectations – Changing organizational behavior is what transforms a facility from good to world class. When passion for safety is driven by a leadership team, it filters down to the floor and will encourage workers to actively care about each other and fosters interdependence within the organization. The job of leadership is to train employees so they make the right decisions. Observation and feedback can help set expectations and change behavior. Teamwork is also critical to success.

Following a simple process safety model such as this can help steer a facility toward its goal of creating a safer workplace. But a successful safety program must also include honest self-inspection to continually improve. This means creating a system that enables production-level employees to communicate honestly to the facility manager and vice versa. Measurement tools should also be established to help determine what is working and what is not. And don't be afraid of failing or not reaching established goals. Finding mistakes will allow an organization to make changes and adjust the safety process to close any gaps.