



# Finding support: From reducing costs to adding value

**D**o you view safety as a cost center or a value contributor to the organization? What about your operational leadership? What should you do if you find yourself supporting those who do not support you and your efforts? The answer often lies in what people see value in, your role in it and how you are selling the value of safety. Yes, you need to sell safety if you desire more than compliance behavior!

Increasingly, companies are realizing not just the altruistic aspect of safety but also the significant business costs of poor safety performance. Many of our clients will not do business with any vendor, regardless of its service offering, if that business has a poor safety performance. One CEO recently stated, "Safety performance is an indicator of company and leadership capability of managing important aspects of the business. If you can't do safety well, what else aren't you doing well?"

While this support for safety results by executive leadership is admirable thinking for the safety professional, caution is advised as an exclusive focus

on safety lagging indicator performance can drive the wrong behavior in many well-intended leaders. For example, if achieving zero injuries is our only goal, let's punish those who report and we will achieve zero injuries! Obviously, this is not ethical. Results themselves are of value, but how they are achieved is often more important.

Great managers not only lead others to great performances, but they also have profound insights into how the results were achieved — safety or otherwise. This led many new organizations to explore their safety excellence strategies and realize they don't really have any. How much value is lost here?

The value of fewer injuries, incidents and regulatory issues is easy to affix a cost savings to. But when you start to see the value of safety excellence in contributions to the business strategy, new value opportunities emerge. Consider this: If the safety strategy is purposeful yet not too aggressive, it allows for business growth and everyone wins. If it is too aggressive, it constricts growth. If the

safety strategy is too weak, reactive, hard or soft, safety costs will follow the growth strategy as the safety professionals mop up after the financial decisions are executed.

Think of the unforeseen employee and regulatory costs that could have easily been vetted out if safety leadership played a role in the diligence process. There are many ways to determine the value safety provides, but it takes having an educational process, sharing information, and understanding what others are doing and why they are doing it to truly gain the right insight.

Leaders need to see the cost of safety excellence as a value-added service to the organization (how it helps in productivity and client acquisition) and not view it as a cost center to manage. To facilitate this, focus on two aspects that will increase the perception of value of safety with most people, from leaders to temporary workers: 1. Is it as efficient as it could be? Look at safety efforts: Is it efficient or is there unnecessary waste? 2. Does it capture and deliver value for its customers? If we

aren't delivering value, we have cultures of "have to" rather than "want to."

Ultimately, we must realize with all the great intent, you can't make people care and you can't force an epiphany. If they are not open to a new way of thinking, others will be. This is why I will only work with executives who demonstrate they truly care about the people, not just the numbers. Life is too short to spend your time frustrated with those who simply don't care. Find leaders who want to be efficient in safety and deliver the customers new exciting value every day. Then everyone wins.

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