



## Two questions to enhance your safety improvement efforts

**T**wo questions have served me well, both as a business owner and as a consultant, and should be asked during every operations and safety improvement meeting: Are we as efficient as we can be? Are we capturing and delivering value to the customers of our efforts?

As companies mature in safety performance and culture, more effort is rarely the answer. How to do better with what we are already doing and how to more effectively aim should be the focus for continued improvement. What does your data tell you about your successes and opportunities? Are you having more of one type of injury? Are incidents largely preventable by improvements in conditions or equipment, administrative controls or specific behaviors? Are less or more tenured employees typically injured? Is there one belief, experience or story most directly impacting your culture? Are you able to see laser-like opportunities, or are they scattered and abundant? In some situations, an outside set of eyes can be helpful in identifying prospects for transformation. In others, the answers are there; the right questions just need to be asked.

*Are we as efficient as we can be?* Management guru Peter Drucker cautioned, "There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all." When assessing a safety observation process at an electric utility provider, an employee had a great question: "Why do people come observe our job just as often as the shop next door?" the employee asked. "We haven't had a recordable injury here for over eight years, and the average experience level here is 15 years on the job. The shop next door makes up over 40 percent of our injuries, and their average experience level is less than two years on the job." Blanketing efforts is not the behavior of high-performing or high-reliability organizations. Where, if you better focused your resources more efficiently, could you yield greater improvement?

*Are we delivering real (and the perception of) value to the customers of our efforts?* I've been working since I was 10 years old. With my first tax-paying job obtained the day I turned 16 (the legal age of unrestricted work in Texas), my father shared something with me that has been the driver of my work ethic: "Shawn, no one will ever owe you a job," he

said. "You have to demonstrate new value every day." Often the simplest advice is the most profound. There are many customers of your safety efforts, and all should be viewed as such. From executive sponsors to hourly employees, all in some fashion receive some sort of value from safety improvement efforts.

Executives might need data and indicators provided, and you need their support. Employees need to comply with government and company rules, and you need their discretionary efforts for safety to truly excel. For business leaders, good safety is good business. When safety contributes to company growth and client acquisition, often more jobs are created. For the employee, he or she is more likely to be injured off the job than on. What can employees learn at work that can help even their families remain injury-free? Who are the many customers of your safety efforts? What is of importance to them, and how are you demonstrating and delivering real (and the perception of) value with your safety improvement efforts?

Consider sharing these questions with other leaders in your organization and challenge them to begin their improvement inqui-

ries here: Are we truly as efficient as we can be, and are we delivering real (and the perception of) value to the customers of our efforts? It should be no surprise when better-focused opportunities present themselves.

**From executive sponsors to hourly employees, all in some fashion receive some sort of value from safety improvement efforts.**

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