



What kind of safety leader do you want to be?

One day, hopefully through retirement, you will leave the safety profession. What legacy do you want to leave behind? What do you need to do to make this happen?

At some point, most parents have had the conversation with their children: “What or who do you want to be when you grow up?” Aside from the admiring children of the safety professional, sadly, few children arrive at their own decision to pursue a career in safety. Kids tend to reply with other types of professions: a police officer, firefighter, doctor, astronaut or cowboy. Being from Texas, the young me wanted to be both a cowboy and sheriff, a Texas Ranger perhaps, but that wasn’t in the cards for me.

When considering professions, we should ask the follow-up question, “Why? What about that type of work interests you?” Do you want to help save or cure people? Do you want to explore uncharted areas or live life chasing the next reward? The “why” helps you find your passion and will increase your happiness and value to others.

I have met and worked with safety professionals from all walks of life. Some were highly effective, and some were lost and appeared to have given up with one foot out the door. Some chose this field early on, pursuing a technical degree like occupational safety and health. Many others, like me, stumbled into this field after a successful career in other fields. With a little coaching, I have seen the most negative professionals finally find their calling. On the other end, I’m close to completing a coaching assignment with a senior safety executive who wishes to accomplish something important prior to retirement. I’ve never seen more excitement and passion in someone desperate to leave their legacy within their last year of work.

The future isn’t promised and neither are the jobs being held by today’s safety leaders. If we are not chasing our passions and advancing the approaches around occupational safety, tomorrow’s leader will. Few companies take on the responsibility of professionally developing their leaders. Whether you have a long career left or just

12 months, today it is largely up to each individual to develop oneself. What are your plans to improve your capabilities and prove your worth to your employer and the people you serve? What would success look like to you in your role five years from now? If you do not first define success for yourself, it is impossible to know with any degree of certainty where to focus your improvement efforts to make the biggest difference to yourself and others.

As a trusted adviser to companies across all industries, I’m often hired to coach and mentor safety professionals to help them increase their effectiveness in their role or prepare them for a new one. The following questions have been useful to all, regardless of role or environment: 1. Why do you want to serve others in this profession? 2. What industry or industries do you want to provide value to and why? 3. What experiences and education do you need to pursue or obtain to become the type of leader you want to be? 4. Five years from now, as you invest in your professional development, how will you be perceived by company

leadership, the workforce, your peers in the profession and your family? 5. What do you see as your most important roles and responsibilities to create these perceptions? 6. How will you track your progress and hold yourself accountable?

Consider reflecting on these important questions and review your answers with a trusted colleague, mentor or coach. You can make a difference and find passion in this work, as there are many roles to play and many important types of safety professionals. You just have to ask yourself, “What kind of safety leader do I want to be?”

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