



Five rules to improve the focus of your organization

Progress begins by thinking differently and becoming better focused on improvement. All organizations will reach a plateau in their continuous improvement efforts without focus. Applying more resources, more programs and more people are rarely the answer. Five rules must be adhered to when looking to focus your efforts. They must be data-driven, relevant, specific, simple and visible.

Data-driven

Creativity might be needed when charting a course into the unknown or with new groups of people working together for the first time. Otherwise, what does your historical data tell you about the needed focus areas? How aligned are the efforts with the insight from data? After focus interviews for one client, all (100 percent) employees reported the current focus for safety improvement was steel-toed shoes or boots and housekeeping. Great alignment, you would think. However, data showed if the site had been perfect at those two things over the past four years, it would have addressed eight percent of the injuries. They were focused, but on the wrong thing.

Relevancy

What you are focusing on must be timely and fitting to the work the individuals are performing. It must also be job specific and perceived as important or significant. One January, a client focused its offshore safety meetings on lawn mower maintenance safety, however at this time of the year, the crews would not be thinking about mowing, nor working on their lawn mowers so the subject wasn't currently relevant.

Specificity

"Reduce hand injuries" is too broad. "Be your brothers' and sisters' keeper" is too wide. "Think safety," is too vague. Whether the area of improvement needed is in compliance, conditions, capital, culture or the capacity of systems to prevent and recover what precisely are the most critical areas, items, behaviors, people, time of the day, day of the week, and thing to do that will make the most significant difference? To verify, is it specific enough? Ask several people what the focus means to them. Further specificity is needed if

you do not have alignment on meaning and required action.

Simplicity

Certainly, complex problems can require complex solutions. Still, if we want to embed focus with a working group and eventually make it cultural, we must work to simplify the complex. Ask, is it simple and easy to understand, learn and use? Is it free from extravagance, luxury and complexity? Are there unnecessary steps or unneeded bureaucracy? Can you reduce it to the essentials?

Visibility

What does a wet floor sign do for most of us? It prompts us to slow down and tread more carefully and lightly. I remember seeing a sign on a piece of power distribution equipment in a remote area of the U.S. It read, "Caution, snakes likely inside." While looking past the obvious, how is that continuing to happen? It brings attention to an unanticipated risk. The focus must be reinforced at or close to the decision point. We must work to get the area or item of focus in the heads

and habits of those performing the work and making decisions throughout the day. But this focus cannot compete with multiple other things, or people will begin to ignore it. Visual management becomes increasingly important as other areas throughout the company compete for the employees' attention.

Considering these five rules, how can you better focus your improvement efforts? Use them as decision qualifiers to bring focus to efforts to improve business performance and culture. Measure your decisions by asking, is it data-driven? Is it relevant? Is it specific? Is it simple? How do we make it visible?

Shawn M. Galloway is CEO of ProAct Safety and co-author of several bestselling books. As an award-winning consultant, trusted advisor, leadership coach and keynote speaker, he has helped hundreds of organizations within every major industry to improve safety strategy, culture, leadership and engagement. He is also the host of the highly acclaimed weekly podcast series Safety Culture Excellence®.

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