Lean Behavior-Based Safety®: A Natural Evolution

Behavior-based approaches have impacted the safety and quality community for more than 30 years. While BBS is based on a few core principles, methodologies struggling for marketplace dominance have been slow to evolve. Any methodology providing results must eventually be enhanced or become obsolete. Moreover, any process that isn't efficient (i.e., Lean) in its search for increasing effectiveness will overburden those supporting it.

Lean does not mean less. Rather, it is a focus on value-add and the continued identification and removal of activities and efforts that add waste, or, more simply put: greater value through less work. As the '90s brought the popularity of Lean Methodologies and Lean Thinking, a natural evolution to BBS was not far behind.

Terry Mathis, creator of Lean Behavior-Based Safety (Lean BBS®) and pioneer in the Behavior-Based Safety community, discovered this logical progression after implementing BBS in the early 1980s and auditing other consultant-led approaches following the founding of ProAct Safety in 1993. Years later, and after well over 1,000 successful Lean BBS implementations in every major industry and existing process-improvement projects, several opportunities have been identified to make a process more efficient *and* effective. Eight of these are identified below:

Opportunities for Lean:

1. Integration — One of the most effective ways to minimize resistance to change is to minimize the perception of it. What existing structure, process, team, or cultural capability would produce a shorter path to results and create the impression of evolution rather than revolution? Perhaps the 5S team becomes the 6S, or integrate your focus on quality to include safety with Behavior-Based Quality & Safety? Both have proven successful in the right environment. What about an existing team or sub-team or committee?

2. Training — Over-training is a common problem when the focus is on implementing a methodology rather than recognizing rapid and sustainable results. Consider what information is needed at this time to accomplish results in the next 90 days. How can you build on that once success is recognized? Why teach a team's members how to analyze data and develop action plans until they have their own data? Think just-enough and just-in-time.

3. Steering Team Size — A team that can never all get together isn't a team. A successful process needs a team representing the interests of the population to make the important decisions of improving process and safety. What that team looks like, how many are on it, and the makeup of levels involved is culturally specific and based largely on trust.

4. Checklist size — Effective BBS processes determine the most important behaviors to focus on, based on historical incidents and observed common-practice data. A focus on more than five or six items is not a focus. Moreover, centering attention on the wrong things is not very efficient. If your checklist isn't focused, neither is your process. Further, the checklist needs to adapt to fit the needs of the process. A process should never revolve around a checklist or be dependent on others to print and modify it.

5. Observation Strategies — Blanketing observations is a tactic to capture a sampling of all common practice. Too often, this becomes the only observation plan. There are four other common observation methods: Aimed, Blitz, Seeing Without Explaining to Every Person (S.W.E.E.P.), and Self. Depending on the data and value that need to be derived from the process, the observation strategy should evolve to focus on new results. Is it aiming at the right thing, time of day, etc.? Is it blitzing where most needed, based on identified influence? S.W.E.E.P. observations are often used to validate a high percent-safe finding, and self-observations are often used with logistically challenged workforces.

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6. Data Utilization — Far too many processes do not analyze their data frequently enough to understand how to prioritize action plans; address data quantity and quality; identify trends and influences on behaviors; and respond to these influences. Any mature process combined with a healthy safety management system can indicate where, when, and why the next incident will occur with a high degree of accuracy, based on observed practices.

8. Voice Of The Customer — When a process is launched, all who will be impacted should be briefed to begin to address the "What's In It For Me" (WIIFM) question. Realize, however, the question never goes away; the answer will change over time. This process must treat others like the customers they are. If process leaders are not communicating in a way that creates strong knowledge and value recognition (e.g., everyone can name the behaviors of focus and recent successes), the support will wane.

9. Documented Roles, Responsibilities and Results — Change initiatives for decades have experienced the middle-management backlash, due to bottom-up and top-down approaches. BBS has been no different. We desperately need supervisors to support the process, yet most processes fail to explain and develop approaches to ensure this occurs. The roles, behaviorally defined responsibilities, and results expected need to be developed for all involved, from those observing to those supporting, leading (e.g., integrate with leader standard work), and serving only in a customer capacity.

Ultimately, the goal of BBS is to improve safety and help those impacted by it to make safer decisions and address the factors that might influence risk-taking (e.g., perceptions, habits, obstacles, and barriers). While there is certainly much more to the Lean BBS methodology, consider how you can use this Lean BBS thinking to eliminate unnecessary or non-value-added steps and maintain a results orientation rather than a crank-the-process one. **OH&S**

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