



# Safety excellence focus trumps fanaticism

Philosopher Santayana believed a fanatic was someone who redoubles effort when the aim is forgotten. Are your efforts focused or fanatical? While we do want a degree of fanaticism in safety, we must realize we can, and often do, go too far.

## Strategy is primarily about making choices on how and where to win.

Keynoting at many private corporate events, I'm usually preceded by the company chief executive. As they set the tone for the occasion and reinforce their position on safety excellence, variations of the following are increasingly heard, "If we and our partners can't be excellent in something as important as safety, what else aren't we good at?" Senior executives are realizing safety performance is an indicator of a leader's ability to direct high-priority efforts, demonstrating capability and alignment with corporate values and goals. It is easy for this message to be misinterpreted, resulting

in more money and resources haphazardly thrown at safety, with the belief that more is better. Focus is better.

While it might not be politically correct for a leader to openly state, "We will not do everything possible to improve safety," it is, unfortunately, the reality. We can't do everything in safety; and even if our goal is to continuously improve and eventually be the best in safety performance, this is achieved through focus, not by being dangerously fanatical about it. For example, many organizations that employ and purchase the services and products of other companies no longer exclusively scrutinize vendor safety performance and the activities deployed to affect it. They are now also looking at aligning cultural expectations as they realize, helped by recent disasters, how influential a combined-culture jobsite can be.

Some of these organizations are precise in how they approach establishing data-driven goals, expectations, and reinforcing communication channels and measurement systems that create a healthy degree of proactive and positive accountability. Others establish blanket, often nonsensical, rules

and zero-tolerance everything. If not careful, they create cultures of fear masked under the guise of, "Because we care." Care is interpreted by observed behavior, not by increasing rules.

Doing every possible program or process, making all possible personal protective equipment mandatory and implementing every conceived rule and policy would confuse and disengage the customers of safety efforts and disastrously impact the business strategy, leaving the company in financial ruin. Some tools and programs can add immediate value, both in improving injury-prevention efforts and measurably enhancing the culture. Others divert capital and attention from other business priorities and objectives.

Focused organizations, and the leaders within, create vision and proactively prioritize the alignment of resources and energy toward safety goals that complement and advance the execution of the business strategy, rather than conflict with it. Focused organizations create and execute against a strategy for safety, rather than relying on fanaticism.

Strategy is primarily about making choic-

es on how and where to win. Choices that determine what to do are just as important as ones that identify what not to do, or what to stop doing. Making the right choices is what leads an organization to sustained safety excellence, where the goals in safety have moved beyond a driving focus on risk and cost reduction to value contribution. When safety is perceived as personally valuable to those impacted by decisions, programs and measurements, everyone wins.

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