



Safety Through Eating Pizza

What is your safety team's brand? How do others feel about the improvement efforts and the people leading it? It is easy for a brand to lose its identity or — worse — allow the wrong one to become created. Each year, more examples make the news in which a single bad customer experience compromises the company's brand. With products,

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services and even cultures, the more negative the experiences, the louder the stories negatively affecting perceptions of the brand. What stories are creating the perception of your improvement efforts within your company?

I was recently hired to help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of a team experiencing a brand problem. They used the acronym STEP (Safety Through Employee Participation) to highlight the focus of their

efforts. Although the team was indeed providing value to the employees they represented and served, they were the only ones who knew it. This is a common problem I come across in my engagements. What they were known for was occasionally bringing in pizza for food during their meetings. As a result, a clever individual within the workforce created a new meaning behind the acronym: Safety Through Eating Pizza. This caught on and stuck, and their brand was compromised, creating the perception that all they do is sit around and eat pizza.

A brand is not just a logo; it is how people identify and associate with a product, service, company or individual(s). Safety already has an existing brand in all companies, and so do the teams that lead improvement in this area. What perceptions exist about your team name, logo, mission, objectives, results and people? If their mission is to influence change within the organization, their ability to do so will be severely compromised if they are viewed as do-nothings or as on the team only for the free food and time away from work. Most teams I've worked with are made up of the right people with the right internal motiva-

tion, and they shouldn't be bashful about letting others know this. But often they don't, and they ultimately lose sight of the importance of protecting their brand.

To improve the brand of your safety team, ask and answer the following six questions: 1. What perceptions currently exist about our team, and why? 2. Are these perceptions accurate? 3. What beliefs do we want to exist about our team, and why? 4. What new information and experiences do we need to provide for the perceptions to change? 5. What are our most important responsibilities as a team to accomplish this change? 6. How do we monitor whether we are changing perceptions and ensure no negative slippage?

In many organizations, this would be a variation of what is referred to as "value stream mapping," which Wikipedia defines as a "... method for analyzing the current state and designing a future state for the series of events that take a product or service from its beginning through to the customer." I often use this methodology because customer focus is precisely what is needed. What value are we providing to the customer with our initiatives? How are we viewed as an asset and value con-

tributor to not just the company, but also the people impacted by improvement initiatives? How are we continuously answering, "What's in it for me?"

Safety Through Eating Pizza is a clever rewording of the STEP team's acronym, but that's not the problem. This cleverness was stickier than the recognition of the value the team was indeed providing. You are either managing your brand or allowing the stories of others to manage it for you.

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