



Five safety considerations for businesses after shutdown

Lessons for business and life are readily available if you are paying attention. With many traditional consulting projects temporarily placed on hold due to COVID-19, attention has refocused to meet new challenges. Helping companies safely manage their responses to shutting down, restarting or operating during the “new normal” has become the new mission. Many lessons have been learned since early 2020. As the economy works to restart, five safety considerations stand out:

1. Safety strategy shakeup: Groups with established, strategic priorities to execute on within the current year will need to review their plans against the new pandemic response and prevention tactics unexpectedly thrust upon safety professionals and teams or committees. What can you still take on within the remainder of this year, and what needs to be pushed back to subsequent years?

2. Changed risk profile: With physical distancing requirements, many organizations have had to redesign how work is performed. Any time work is changed, the

risk profile has the opportunity to change as well. Additionally, many companies have new, large quantities of alcohol-based hand sanitizers. Are they correctly stored in flammable liquids cabinets or in areas protected by an automatic sprinkler system? What other risks have changed? Has your risk matrix been assessed or updated?

3. Communication confusion: “Wear a mask.” “Don’t wear a mask.” “Shut down and stay home.” “Reopen; we are going in the right direction.” “Shut down; we are going in the wrong direction.” These are easy examples of the mass confusion and frustration felt by anyone watching the news or press briefings over the past four months. Realize how quickly credibility is lost when the message is unclear or repeatedly changes. How clear, consistent, multidirectional and transparent are your communications? How are you verifying the messages you are sending? Are they being received and understood?

4. Narratives: Since the pandemic began, narratives have been quickly created and changed, and those narratives have

changed society’s behavior. Whoever has the loudest influential voice will shape the storytelling in a small group, culture or society. It is the stories that will perpetuate or change culture. As we have seen, absent our access to the right information or data, a narrative will be created that usually will not be the one you desire. If you want to change the narrative, you have to change beliefs. To do so, you must change the information and experiences. With the news of changing current events, we have seen this on a large scale. Consider who is shaping the storytelling within your occupational culture. How will you reinforce the desirable stories? How will you change the undesirable ones?

5. Control vs. influence: The COVID-19 pandemic has presented an interesting and unfortunate case study on controlling and influencing human behavior, as some people willingly comply with government mandates while others openly resist even data-driven requests for behavioral change through influential methods. Within corporations, there will always exist behaviors that are required

and must be controlled, as they help prevent serious injuries. Other behaviors can only be addressed through influence. How clear are these within your group? How consistent and timely are your efforts to both control and influence behavior?

As many organizations get back to normal operations, they are able to refocus their efforts in their pursuit of safety excellence. While some risks may have changed, a strategy is needed that ensures effective communication, perpetuates the right narratives and recognizes not all behavior can be controlled, nor should it be.

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