



A new year, a new reality for safety professionals

With every new year, new realities are presented to us. Some as reflections as the year ends, while others are constructed as highly probable predictions. Let's discuss the latter.

When we are able to identify indicators of developing trends, predict and respond proactively, we are making progress. This holds true for the advancements in occupational safety and the evolving role of the safety professional.

As many organizations recovering from the global economic downturn of the past four years have come to realize, businesses and the players within will never be the same. If you do not change with the game, you will find yourself benched. Regretfully, many have.

Every week, emails and notifications on the ever-expanding social platforms bring résumés and connection requests from those unfortunately cast out by organizations changing the game right under the feet of the unexpected, yet capable, safety professionals. These leaders must become privy to the new reality.

Working since I was 11, with multiple

paper routes in my small childhood community of Clinton, N.J., I learned the value of hard work to attain what I desired — a new bicycle. However, when I turned 16 and obtained my first “real” job, my father sat me down and told me something I have never forgotten. “Shawn, no one will ever owe you a job. You have to demonstrate new value every day,” he said. Call it establishing work ethic or good parental advice but this has been my mantra and it needs to be yours.

Occupational safety is evolving. While not yet universally perfect, safety is becoming a core value within many global organizations. Fewer businesses are solely blaming the worker and are now looking at how systems, leadership and culture motivate risk taking. This is resulting in the need for value contributors and business thinkers as safety leaders, not doers. Companies that hire safety professionals to “take care of safety” or “do safety” are thankfully becoming fewer.

In my work where I coach many great safety leaders to increase their effectiveness, the following is a list of some of the questions I use to shape conversations and encourage self-improvement efforts.

1. Do you focus your safety efforts on reducing cost or on demonstrating new organizational value?

2. How do you ensure safety is integral to the hiring/promotion process, not just orientation and onboarding?

3. Do you spend more of your time policing or coaching for safety?

4. Do you probe and truly analyze before you advise, or does advice fall off you as you walk by?

5. How do you demonstrate you are a change agent and challenge status-quo thinking?

6. How do you integrate sound business principles into safety efforts while also working to integrate safety principles into business thinking?

7. How clear, repeatable and believable is your overall safety performance and cultural excellence strategy?

8. How much time have you personally invested in improving your ability to create and deliver new value?

9. What have you contributed to the safety profession this past year that no one else can claim?

10. Do you know how to communicate your successes without appearing to boast?

Safety professionals are responsible for the perceptions others have about them. Are you perceived as a thought leader and value-contributing consultant within your organization, or one who manages the cost center of safety? Changing perceptions occurs with a change in information and experiences. To manage this, consider the experiences you provide those you interact with. Are you leaving a legacy as someone who contributed new value, helping the business and customers of safety advance their abilities, or as one who simply did safety?

Galloway is the president of ProAct Safety. As a professional keynote speaker and internationally recognized safety excellence expert, he has helped hundreds of organizations within every major industry achieve and sustain excellence in performance and culture. Galloway is also the host of the highly acclaimed weekly podcast series, Safety Culture Excellence®, and co-author of “STEPS to Safety Culture Excellence.”

For more information, email info@ProActSafety.com or call (800) 395-1347.

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