



Workplace Safety News

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Behavior-Based Safety: A Streamlined, Cost-Conscious Approach That Brings Results

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Behavior-Based Safety (BBS) has effectively influenced risk for over 30 years and has contributed to improvement in performance and culture in the majority of organizations who have implemented a process. After personally implementing hundreds of processes globally and being exposed to hundreds more, I have found that BBS is defined differently by almost all who utilize it.

Rather than offering the author's definition of BBS, a structural understanding will be provided instead. For the purpose of this article, there are four elements necessary for a successful process, regardless of methodology.

1. **FOCUS**– Identify the precautions critical to minimize risk exposure and the prevention of incidents.
2. **INFLUENCE** – Observe and provide positive feedback to influence future decisions.
3. **LISTEN** – Gather anonymous insight into what might influence (perceptions, habits, obstacles, barriers) a person's ability to take a precaution so action plans can be developed to address the reasons for risk.
4. **MEASURE** – Create new metrics to proactively manage and influence excellence in culture and performance.

Some organizations have taken a homegrown approach, while many more have chosen the expert-assisted path. Regardless of method, the biggest opportunity for improvement is to utilize a process-orientation.

Behavior-based approaches are but a tool in the ever-improving safety and quality toolbox. Many companies, and even more consultants, place too much faith in their processes or fall in love with their methodology. They tend to forget one vital element: results.

Every organization is different. Thus any approach to improvement, BBS or otherwise, must be made to fit the organization and its needs. If the process demonstrates early results, it must be tweaked to continuously produce fresh results. Any methodology that produces change must adapt to fit the new environment it has created to continue providing value.

Far too many processes lose sight of this and focus on the wrong indicators: process metrics. Progress towards desired results is quite motivational, but the overwhelming majority of process metrics only communicate or focus on the number of observations. A process that regularly accomplishes the target number of observations with a great degree of participation is not effective if it fails to change common practice, thought processes, or to move the needle on lagging indicators. Moreover, processes that are implemented well are not successful until they have demonstrated sustainable results.

Finding improvement opportunities, and thus new results, happens best when following internal discussions. Asking the right questions also places an emphasis in the right area. If the questions asked center around process-related issues, a process orientation is created. Never forget that process metrics are critical, but they are not the goal. The goal is to help everyone become 100% safe, 100% of the time.

The 10 questions below have been specifically designed to facilitate collaborative discussions and find a unique pathway towards the necessary results orientation.

1. What percentage of the population can name the precautions of focus?
2. What percentage of the population can name three successes over the past ninety days?
3. What triggers activity (observations, meetings, communication) in the process?
4. Is the focus just on the behavior or also on the reason for the behavior?
5. How many people have asked to either be observed or be a part of the process?
6. Does the process conflict and compete with operations, or integrate and positively influence it?
7. What percentage of the expertise is internalized or externalized?
8. Does everyone at the site, regardless of role, understand their responsibilities and what is expected?
9. If focus was placed on addressing one influence on risk in your organization, what would it be?
10. How does the BBS process influence off-the-job safety?

Every year at ProAct Safety's annual BBS conference, hundreds of attendees prove that the more efficient a behavioral process is, the more effective it will be. The late Peter Drucker once wrote, "There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all." Efficiency is vital, but pointless if misfocused. Answering the questions above will help organizations focus efficiently and effectively on the thing that matters most: a risk-free outcome.

Please join me on February 22 for the [BLR webinar](#) "Behavior-Based Safety: A Streamlined, Cost-Conscious Approach That Brings Results", that will explain the ins and outs of a streamlined BBS program – and why this approach could make sense for your workplace.

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