O
ganizations striving to achieve sus-
tainable excellence begin with a fun-
damental question: Do we truly want to
be the best in the world in this operational
category, or do we want to try to be the best
we can? These are two different questions
resulting in two different answers. For orga-
nizations to achieve organizational align-
ment and accountability, clarity is needed.
Rather than solely expressing accountabil-
ity through repeated communication, which
certainly adds initial value, a value frame-
work is needed to reflect decisions upon.

In my April article in BIC Magazine (page
58), I proposed five simple questions that
should be utilized in order to ensure sustain-
ability of safety excellence. High-performing
organizations base their operational decisions
on the answers they receive to these.

1. How is safety enhanced by this deci-
sion? Will this decision enhance or com-
promise any facet of safety? If safety is to
play a role in the decisions of executives or
part-time employees, the question needs to
be asked and answered. The realist in me
recognizes we cannot remove all risk expo-
sure in any industrial setting. While this is a
reality in all businesses, ask if the decision
makes progress toward safety excellence
possible, creates no change or takes us back
a few steps?

2. How will this influence behavior in
the organization? People do things for a
reason. If a desire exists to understand the
impact on personal behaviors, the motives
must be addressed. Moreover, behavioral
approaches have taught us if we change
influences, we change behavior. Will this
decision positively or negatively impact
the influences on desirable behavior? A
decision that changes the motivation of
individuals will, without question, change
what they do. This is human nature.

3. How will this influence ownership
in safety? Dr. Deming, founder of our
generation’s quality movement, said it best.
“People support what they help create.”
Ownership in performance is critical to
achieving excellence in any operational
category. Doing what is required meets
performance objectives. Achieving excel-
lence is accomplished through organiza-
tional alignment, by focusing on individual
contributions toward a goal. This can only
be accomplished through ownership. Will
this decision help individuals further their
ownership role in safety?

4. How will we gather insight by those
affected by the decision? Research has
proved responses to decisions are first
prompted by emotion and then followed by
logic. Empowering others to make similar
decisions that consider the core value of
safety needs to be reinforced. How will
we be sure we understand the operational
safety implications of this decision? Hint:
The answers are there if we engage others
and keep our ears open.

5. How will this help us be the best
in safety? If our desire is to be the best in
safety, this is the most important question to
consider. Operational decisions should be
made that reflect the organization’s intent.
If the goal is to be the best in safety, will
this decision take us closer toward that goal,
have no impact or divert our direction?

Remember, core values will never
become culturally shared beliefs if they are
delegated to a single person or department.
If it is a core value, it needs to be tested
to be reinforced. Beginning this dialogue
is the first step toward creating a culture
where progress is validated on a decision-
by-decision basis. The decision for what
type of culture to create is up to you.

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