



Executive decisions: Enabling or hindering safety progress

Helping people recognize hidden risk is one of the more complicated tasks I perform. This is due to the hundreds of ways risk disguises itself as normal, everyday situations. Unfortunately, for executives, the further a company is on the path to sustainable safety culture excellence, the more difficult it can be to identify risk. Largely, this is due to the decreasing degree of probability. As organizations exhaust the returns from improvements in conditional safety (safety engineering) and from behaviorally-focused initiatives (behavior-based safety), organizational decision making becomes a more transformational leverage point.

This is not to say decisions that compromise safety are intentional. In fact, by my observations, that is rare. Rather, decisions are driven by a complex mixture of shareholder desires, executive directives, organizational values, hypercompetitive priorities, personal ambitions, and sometimes, just trying to do the right thing. The effects of organizational decisions impose varying influences upon the individuals within, even among companies that hold safety value as superior to others.

Influences of this type are rarely identified through traditional event investigations or analysis. These influences can get overlooked due to the individual identifying causation is in a surface-level position; the individual is a part of the organizational systems and influences; or simply, we still have a lot to learn in safety. Consider how far we have progressed in safety over the past few decades. Recent causation models and risk-identification/mitigation techniques available today were beyond conceptual ability even 10 years ago.

This is one reason why organizations that are notorious for not engaging consultants eventually seek an outside perspective. I believe it is important to note that consultants "hired" to provide this unique perspective are best used in a leveraged manner. It is the role of the consultant to be insatiably curious, well-versed in the latest research and advanced methodologies, industry and non-industry specific best practices, and most importantly, realize excellence does not come in a predefined solution or program.

No consultant or program will ensure

the organization can achieve and sustain excellence in any area of operational performance. Rather than proposing solutions, it is the consultant's role to ask the difficult, thought-provoking questions to begin the improvement conversations. It is the executive's role to continue the conversation.

An outside perspective is often helpful to identify hidden waste and value-adding opportunities, and to recommend internally led path strategies to recognize substantial gains. If the strategies are carried out from within the culture, ownership in the progress helps facilitate cultural reinforcement of these strategies. However, this will not occur unless the leadership reinforces the progress through measurement, feedback and by continuously asking specific questions.

For an organization to achieve and sustain excellence, a decision has to be made. Do you truly want to be the best in safety or just do enough? Those that become the best experience a safety reflection during their decision-making sessions. Those that achieve safety excellence utilize some of the following questions to ensure sustainability.

- How is safety enhanced by this decision?
- How will this influence behavior in the organization?
- How will this influence ownership in safety?
- How will we gather insight from those affected by the decision?
- How will this help us be the best in safety?

Look for next month's article in which these statements will be elaborated upon and insight into their specific role in executive decision-making will be provided.

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LOCKOUT!

PART 3

IT'S BEEN A ROUGH DAY FOR THE SAFE-T-CORP. THERE'S BEEN A LOCKOUT VIOLATION, SAFE-T-MAN'S DOWN, BICSTER'S OVERRIDE HAS BEEN OVERRIDDEN, AND ENFORCER DROPPED SAM FROM THE PLATFORM.

