

For sustainable safety, leaders must do more coaching, less policing | Drilling Contractor

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Working only to obey the rules and wear PPE typically creates minimal-effort safety cultures without proactive employees

By Shawn M. Galloway, ProAct Safety

Is your goal to exercise control over your employees or to create a motivated workforce inspired to go above and beyond and continuously ask of each other, "Are we currently the best we can be?"

"Flow," proposed by **Mihály Csíkszentmihályi**, a leading researcher on positive psychology, is a state of being in which a person is fully focused and involved in the successful outcome of a task. Flow is the best working definition of desirable, intrinsic motivation. This means there is no incentivizing, forcing, threatening or competitive environment to create an outcome. The desire to achieve is purely internal.

To create sustainable, above-and-beyond performance in others, you must create a situation in which an individual feels motivated to provide the critical discretionary effort. Preaching the necessity of certain behaviors and the penalty for non-conformance does more harm than good. Motivating someone to do something typically results in either short-term behavioral change or the creation of behaviors to avoid further "motivation."

Charlie 2-2-3

Let's look at the example of Michael. Early in Michael's career, he was a safety compliance officer for an oilfield company. His role was to inspect company-owned locations for compliance with government and company standards. Unfortunately, the fact that he was a caring individual with a passion for the safety and well being of others mattered little. He was known as a "safety cop."

Michael told me the following story of when he realized he was perceived in this manner. It hit during his third visit on a company location to audit and provide feedback. On his visits, Michael would arrive, exit his company vehicle, put on his personal protective equipment (PPE) and walk toward the entrance. Just before he was to enter the facility, he would hear over the loudspeaker, "Charlie 2-2-3, Charlie 2-2-3."

On his third visit, he realized "Charlie 2-2-3" was code for "The safety guy is on site." This prompted people to begin using their horns while operating forklifts and to properly wear their PPE.

This is when Michael realized he was indeed a "safety cop."

I hold first-responders in the highest regard; yet the sad reality is, while police officers work aggressively to create positive images of themselves, they are often perceived as those who issue tickets and fault-find rather than as the problem-solvers and problem-preventers that they are.

This holds true for people with safety responsibility; they are seen as problem creators

rather than as operational excellence advisers.

it's not one person's responsibility

More organizations are relying less on having safety personnel on location on a daily basis to ensure compliance because they are concerned that safety will be viewed as one person's responsibility, rather than everyone's responsibility. More and more, organizations are creating ownership in and responsibilities for safety at multiple levels, including those in a management, supervisory or team leader positions.

At conferences, I am very fortunate to speak alongside many senior executives of companies who truly understand the role safety plays among the hyper-competitiveness of organizational priorities. It is often said by these individuals, "Good safety is good business."

Many organizations that use contractor services are measuring delivery capabilities by more than the standard performance indicators. These customers are increasingly concerned about their contractors' safety performance and are developing the perspective, as shared to me privately by one executive recently, "If you can't manage something as important as safety, well, what else are you not able to do well?"

If an organization can accomplish incredible performance outcomes at the sacrifice of employee safety, what does this say about the long-term viability of the company? Moreover, if safety can be sacrificed and profit is the sole driving force, it is not long until negative performance indicators are realized in quality, customer service, delivery and competency.

Inspire, not manage

Managing for compliance is a fundamental aspect of any successful safety management system, but what is "management"? The average definitions for management range anywhere from control, handling or direction over behavior to aligning groups or individuals to accomplish goals in the best manner possible.

The foundation for safety excellence has two parts: management and influence. Management is critical to help a group become compliant and ensure groups act in alignment for recognition of performance targets. Influencing grows in importance when we recognize the limitations of compliance on the path toward sustainable excellence.

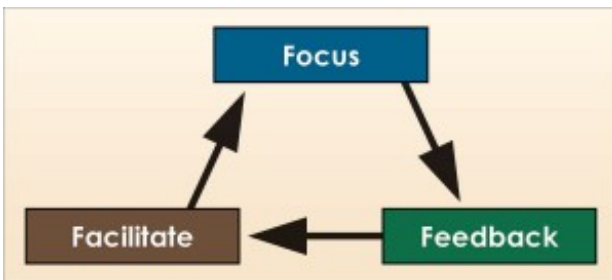
American businessman **Lee Iacocca** once said, "Any supervisor worth his salt would rather deal with people who attempt too much than those who try too little." We need to create cultures where people feel safe to innovate. Working only to obey the rules, follow the procedures and wear PPE ensures no one experiences a compliance-related injury. It also typically creates a culture that works hard to ensure that minimal effort becomes common practice, and does little to guarantee people are proactive in their personal risk identification and mitigation/removal efforts.

This desirable state can be recognized only when people feel motivated and trust the systems in which their performance is measured and in the people who measure it. If you want new results, people have to be inspired, not managed.

Proven Coaching Model

When I ask audiences to think of a person who has provided great inspiration and

successfully motivated a team or group of people, the predominant answer is a coach. The purpose of a coach is to help others work toward their strengths and be the best they can be. A coach is not a problem-performance manager; this more often falls into the category of counseling.



Focus, feedback and facilitate make up this three-part coaching model for safety. Focus addresses what you want the individual to do; feedback entails positive reinforcement and the expression of concern; and facilitate means removing roadblocks from employees' paths to successful behavior.

The following three-part coaching model has been extremely successful:

- Focus - What specifically do you want the individual to do? Certainly it is encouraged to allow people to maintain a sense of autonomy in much of what they do. In safety, if there are behaviors or precautions known to minimize or eliminate risk exposure, this often becomes an organizationally aligned coaching focus. Rather than solely concentrating communication around desirable results, which is more typical than we admit, can you behaviorally describe what actions are necessary to accomplish a desirable target? If yes, can your employees? If they cannot, the focus is not aligned.
- Feedback - The most effective forms of feedback for performance coaching are positive reinforcement (designed to encourage specific behavior to continue) and the expression of concern (designed to help break complacency, raise awareness, understand risk-taking in a non-confrontational manner, and talk through alternatives).
- Facilitate - Make it easy for employees to successfully accomplish the tasks in the safest and most successful manner possible. Providing focus and feedback is valuable when there are no obstacles or barriers in their way. Sometimes a leader has to create the path for someone to be successful. This requires the removal of roadblocks to ensure the desirable behavior is possible.

Moving Forward

Helping supervisors to become safety coaches has provided significant value for hundreds of organizations, even outside of safety. The skills provided to coach for safety performance can easily be leveraged to coach for other areas of operational performance.

American author Mark Victor Hansen said, "In imagination, there's no limitation." Cops are perceived to penalize people. Coaches help individuals achieve what they previously believed was impossible. This is the role of a great leader. What role will you play today?

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