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by Shawn M. Galloway

Overcoming Tomorrow's Challenges: The Transformational HSE Leader

Health, safety and environmental (HSE) professionals face an increasing challenge – one that intensifies with each new hyper-competitive priority. It is little wonder why organizations strive to move safety from a priority to a value. To create these shared values within an organization, they must be reinforced at or near the point of decision. In principle, this always holds true. In practice, accomplishing this grows increasingly difficult.

Simply stating that safety is a value at an increasing frequency and passion does not make it so. The successful HSE leaders of tomorrow cannot simply work towards value creation; they must become transformational leaders.

Since the recent global economic recession, the successful HSE practitioners have recognized and overcome the following three elements that obstruct one from becoming a transformational HSE professional. If not addressed, they too will trouble even the most passionate and effective leader.

Resources – The common statement, “Do more with less,” is more reality than humour. If we are to be successful in anything we do, we must show and demonstrate sustainable value. Now is not the time for luxury trial-and-error, off-the-shelf programs, and niceties. Our global economy is moving towards efficient effectiveness at a greater pace than ever before. If it is not lean, it will not last. Thus, approaches that are an ineffective use of resources have failed before they begin. Transformation will not occur through a squandering of our resources. Rather, it is accomplished through

ensuring focus is perpetually on “value-add.” The transformational leader ensures proactive data is leveraged to focus energy, rather than opinions.

Inspiration – To achieve minimal compliance, a balance of consequences is employed to shape behaviour. Desirable culturally-reinforced discretionary effort is a byproduct of intrinsic motivation. The transformational leader works to ensure a culture is created that proactively seeks out and destroys demotivators. Effort is made, then, to inspire and recognize those employees who go above and beyond what is required in safety.

Support – Transformation results from strong support at all levels of the organization. It is not enough to have a caring leader. Support is perceived, not by your thoughts, but by your actions. The transformational leader defines support for all levels in the organization by observable actions and provides data and visible progress to ensure support increases and is sustainable.

Sustainable success is only accomplished through an established, shared passion at all levels for cultural and performance excellence. Passion is essential to prevent the structure that has been created from crumbling among the other hyper-competitive priorities and aforementioned barriers. However, transformational leaders must realize they can't accomplish sustainable excellence alone.

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