

Safety Ideas: To Share or Not To Share?

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Every day, life provides valuable lessons afforded only to those who are open to learning. Societal advancement occurs when those who discover such lessons freely share them with all of mankind.

In 1990, the world discovered Peter Senge's now bestselling classic, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. According to Dr. Senge, learning organizations are, "... organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and where people are continually learning how to learn together."

Such organizations will never become a reality if we are unwilling to share newly discovered ideas. There are some who believe there are no new ideas, just new environments for our old ideas to work within. If this is true, what then led to the new environments? Progress will only occur when we realize that what worked to achieve today's results will not guarantee further results tomorrow. We must tear apart our paradigms; we must seek different answers if we seek different results.

George Bernard Shaw once said: "If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange these apples, then you and I will still each have one apple. But if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas."

For occupational safety to continually produce further results, we must be willing to learn together and share our newly discovered ideas. Placing strategies or tactics in the public domain for all to benefit from is not only in the best interest of the survival of mankind, it is the only ethical thing to do. After all, doesn't this only serve to make us smarter? When new ideas are shared freely, opportunities are presented for debate, often leading to necessary continuous improvement and the overall advancement in occupational safety.

I can appreciate trademarking terms, software or specific detailed methodologies for the protection and continuance of the business and individuals who create them. I, too, participate in such things. After all, without the revenues derived from such developments, businesses would not be able to afford the capital needed to test and discover such advancements. However, protecting new ideas behind offerings where learning can only occur after payment is received, is placing profit in front of safety. Isn't this what many safety professionals struggle with: organizations that place profit in front of safety? If I discover a new tactic or idea that could save someone's life and I do not freely share it in my articles, talks, videos or podcasts, then shame on me.

In January 2008, I began the weekly audio and video podcast, *Safety Culture Excellence*[®]. I am now nearing my 200th episode. The sole purpose of this idea-sharing channel is to provide ideas to the public, so individuals can freely take them and find ways to make the ideas fit their organization or culture.

When an idea is available only after payment and is then legally protected, barriers are created and the organization's ability to successfully execute and implement is compromised. When a company has to make itself fit an idea, unnecessary resistance occurs, leading to the notorious Program-of-the-Month.

My challenge to all of you is to seek new ways to share your views. There are many opportunities to begin doing so with no or little cost.

1. Audio, written or video blog
2. Company publications

3. Magazine articles
4. Presentations to individuals within your company
5. Talks at industry events and safety conferences
6. Twitter, Facebook and other social networking platforms
7. Online groups and discussion boards

Any inventor will confirm that few ideas, when first presented, are perfect solutions to the identified need; yet, they persist. Do not be afraid to innovate and display your discoveries to the world.

Remember, regardless of how educated you think you are, never stop learning. We are far from perfect in safety and risk management.

If you have yet to find your voice and share your thoughts, the world today is more conducive of such things than ever before. Give it a try and please consider sharing with me so I, too, can benefit from your thoughts. If, however, the desire to share ideas in safety is only prompted by profit and revenue, then respectfully, shame on you.