

## Strategy Begins with Transformational Focus

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Facility safety excellence will never become a reality until conditional improvements, as well as the behaviors and beliefs in the organization, are strategically aligned and focused on transformational opportunities. Moreover, the efforts to manage facility safety will always be only as effective as the culture that resides within it and the ability to prioritize the improvement of conditional safety by proactively identified risk and/or observed risk exposure.

We all strive to become more proactive in our thinking and actions because we know this is the best path to prevention. We seek continuous improvement and better approaches and methods to affect our results. Yet how many organizations, when teaching root cause methodology, concentrate the techniques on responding to identified risk exposure first (both in training and application), compared to investigating incidents? Both have application, but where is the focus? Far too many organizations focus their continuous improvement efforts on reacting more effectively and efficiently, rather than concentrating on identification and mitigation, negating the need to react better. Waiting until you are perfect at your reaction techniques is not only ineffective, it can be career limiting.

It is the responsibility, not just of the safety leaders but the operational leaders as well, to obtain results in both safety performance and culture. One cannot manage *results* for facility safety, at least not ethically. Performance needs to be the focus, as it can be aligned, measured, motivated and managed. Identifying and determining the focus is the purpose of this article.

### Determine Focus: Prevention

Incidents can be prevented and safety improved in one of two ways: by changing the *conditions* that contribute to incidents or minimizing the capability of behaving in a safe manner, or by changing *behaviors* that can control the probability of incidents. Conditions can either cause or increase the chances of an incident. Certain types of conditions (barriers) negate or limit behavioral choices.

Behaviors can also impact the probability of incidents. Behaviors that significantly lower the probability of incidents are called precautions. Of course there are things that influence behavior that leadership should provide such as training, work design and clear priorities, values and direction. In addition to behaviors that contribute to incident prevention, there are those that either contribute to, or conflict with, the desirable culture, which influence the behaviors of others.

Figure 1 simplistically outlines an approach that helps determine and prioritize the focus of efforts in safety. Is it vital to first begin with determining focus of injury prevention, conditions or behaviors, or both? While it is the responsibility of the organization to provide a safe work environment, it is the responsibility of the leaders to prioritize what areas are focused on first. If it is known there are conditions that are contributing to incidents or preventing safe behaviors, they need to receive immediate focus in their safety work orders and capital investments. However, once an organization has exhausted the approaches to conditional safety, evolution to behaviors needs to occur.

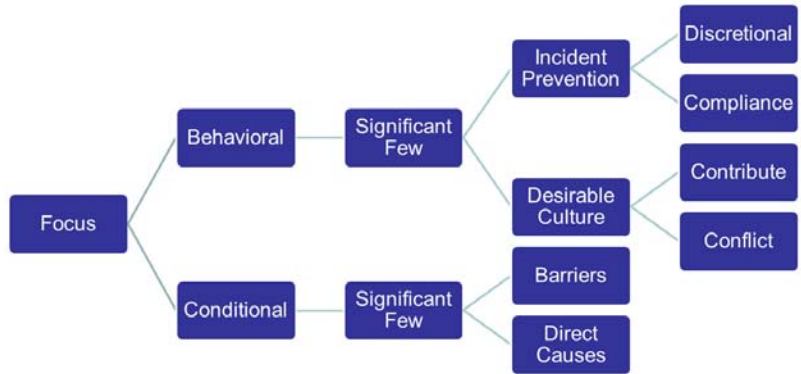


Figure 1: Determining Transformational Focus for Incident Prevention™

Behaviors have always been a part of safety. Policies, procedures and required personal protective equipment all fall into the category of compliance behavior. If your incidents are occurring due to the deviation from set policies and procedures, you do not need an approach to Behavior-Based Safety. You need to strengthen the capabilities of your leaders to understand and neutralize the motivation to deviate, and if intentional, to enforce the standards.

Once the focus and appropriate initiatives have been identified, the focus moves to sustainability of both performance and results. Consider first answering the following: If you are successful in these efforts, what is your confidence level that the incidents will not be repeated? How will you validate everyone is working in an aligned direction and the results are occurring due to purposeful intent rather than luck?

### Determining Focus: Sustainability

Culture is a significantly complex subject I have written on extensively. For the purpose of this article, culture will be simply defined as the shared beliefs that align and motivate behavior within a group. Figure 2 outlines a simplified version of a model used to explain how cultures form and norm.

Perceptions drive the decisions that are made by individuals in an organization, both in the presence and absence of others. When decisions are made or not made, behaviors occur that provide experiences to both the actor and those impacted by the behavior. Experiences, negative and positive, shape the stories that are told in the group, which ultimately shape the perceptions. Additionally, the more negative the experiences, the louder the stories. Good stories are not told as frequently as expectations of the decisions that prompted the behaviors are met, but occasionally great experiences are shared as the expectations are exceeded.



Figure 2: Simplified Safety Culture Excellence Evolution Model™

To determine the cultural focus for immediate or sustainable improvement, answer the following questions:

1. What perceptions would exist if we were excellent in safety at our facility?
2. What decisions would be made by those in each level, who are themselves excellent in safety and play a pivotal role in helping accomplish great results?
3. What behaviors would we see or hear from all levels of individuals that create the impression that they, themselves, are excellent safety role models?
4. What do we want individuals to experience to shape the desired perceptions?
5. What stories do we want to exist, formally and informally, in our culture that reinforces the facility's dedication to safety culture and performance excellence?

No one ever said it would be easy. If it were, everyone would have achieved perfection in safety. Great results occur with a transformational focus and a great executable strategy. There are no magic formulas outlined in this article, just a framework that has worked with hundreds of facilities.

The goal of this article is to challenge your thinking and share ideas for you to internally develop and lead your journey to sustaining safety culture excellence. Managing facility safety starts with safe conditions. However, the work you do to keep the facility safe, while important, remains at the site when the employees leave at the end of each day. What beliefs and behaviors are you ensuring leave with them so they will return risk-and injury-free the following workday?



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