



The five most dangerous safety perceptions

The belief-barriers to excellence

Our beliefs affect how we perceive life's experiences, our safety decisions and the culture in which we work. Work cultures are the result of reinforced work practices. This reinforcement focuses on the continuation of behaviors, values and perceptions. This exemplifies the fact cultures are, indeed, the ultimate safety sustainability mechanism.

Time without incidents reinforces perceptions that it's acceptable to take a risk, as long as you are not injured.

It is, therefore, extremely important to understand and address the five most dangerous perceptions that have proved to be barriers to achieving and sustaining safety culture excellence. Do they exist in your organization?

1. *Zero recordables isn't possible.* Many multinational organizations have sustained the difficult goal of zero recordable injuries, not that this should be the ultimate measure-

ment of safety excellence. It is, at best, a failure rate and does not promote success-seeking strategies, only failure-avoidance. However, the principle here is, if people do not believe in the destination, especially if they are in a leadership position, the sustainable journey will be an impossible one.

2. *Safety excellence means not getting hurt.* The belief is created that, "If safety means not getting hurt, than anything I do that doesn't get me hurt must be safe." Unfortunately, this falsity is perpetuated by the way many companies measure safety. Time without incidents reinforces perceptions that it's acceptable to take a risk, as long as you are not injured. Society requires understanding of the difference between safe and luck. The measurements in safety (formal and perceptual) need to reflect this.

3. *Safety is not my job.* Without question, it is the primary responsibility for a company to first create a safe working environment. However, no organization can be safe for the people within it. Each individual needs to recognize the vital precautions they can exercise to minimize their exposure to the risks they face throughout life, both on and off the job.

4. *It won't happen to me.* The vast majority of individuals interviewed following an injury described a similar belief. As organizations improve safety, they tend to reach a safety performance plateau due to their efforts in eliminating high-probability risk. What remains is low-probability risk, which most people are unable to recognize with common sense and experience. Every environment has risks that are impossible to engineer out. This is why complacency becomes a dangerous element. It is critical to maintain a sense of vulnerability. It can happen to us because there is inherent risk in all environments. The challenge lies in our ability to recognize these risks and take personal steps to minimize exposure.

5. *We are already good.* The average company is quite impressive in their safety performance measurements. There can be a tendency to believe, "We are already good." This belief is particularly dangerous. Many well-intentioned safety executives will inadvertently create this perception by implementing programs that are not customized to

the culture and result in little value recognition. As a result, many feel there is nothing else that can be done to improve.

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