



Staying focused 'in' safety during a crisis

If someone is overwhelmed by fear and uncertainty, how do they stay focused to remain injury- and disease-free on and off the job?

By the time this article is published, I hope the world is in a better place and these words serve as a learning opportunity for future preparedness rather than still being relevant and timely advice. As I write this, we are experiencing a crisis born from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and fueled by fear

Focus employees on the critical risks and what they must do on and off the job to keep themselves healthy and safe.

and uncertainty. Most travel — even domestic — has ceased. Countries are closing their borders, and some are imposing mandatory quarantines on their citizens. Millions of children are home because of school closures, which

could continue for the rest of the school year. Parents are uncertain about how to go to work and who will watch their children during the workday.

Gatherings of even small groups are forbidden in many places. Restaurants are shutting their doors for an indefinite period of time, and some will likely never reopen. Businesses are failing. Layoffs and furloughs have begun. Aisles in grocery stores are being emptied as soon as they are restocked. The immediate future looks bleak for many, with no certainty of when life will be back to normal or what the new normal will look like. During all of this, we still need our workforce to continue their duties. Moreover, we need them not to be injured or unhealthy on or off the job, as this would also impact the business continuity concerns leaders are currently faced with.

As the real impact on the U.S. is young at the time of writing this, people are scared. During the past week, several organizations reported an increase in safety injuries, likely due to the fear and uncertainty on many employees' minds. Understandably but regrettably, many companies are canceling safety

meetings, not wanting to bring people together in groups. During this time, it is not just important to keep the message about safety top of mind. A focus on safety — needed especially during a crisis like this one — is a focus *in* safety.

When driving, we focus and scan. We focus on the lines on the road or the curbs on the side, as that helps us navigate. We don't, however, just stare at these; we scan our sector, watching the behavior of other vehicles, looking for pedestrians and animals. We focus and scan. During a watershed moment, people are focused on the uncertainty and trying their best to scan for things that might injure them. This is analogous to driving and focusing more on the conversation (you shouldn't be having) on your cellphone than on the road ahead. This is dangerous, as we all know, but this is what is happening at work. Minds are justifiably distracted.

To develop a focus in — not just on — safety, answer these questions: What are the big (high-probability, high-severity) risks? What are the common (low-probability and uncertain severity) risks? What precautions

are required to overcome the big risks, and which precautions at the discretion of the employee are necessary to address the common risks? How will you get this in the heads of the workforce with limited communication channels? How do you control the required precautions, and how do you influence and coach employees through the discretionary precautions, with limited ability to provide group or close individual feedback?

During a crisis, we need specificity within safety. Focus employees on the critical but few big and common risks, and what they must do on and off the job to keep themselves healthy and safe.

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