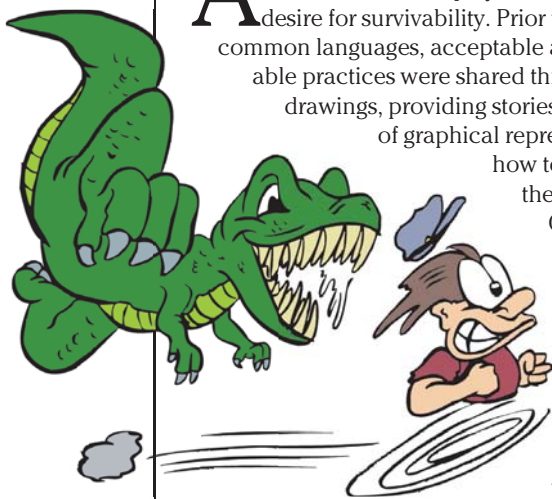


Establishing a Culture of Safety Excellence: Strategies Worth Repeating



Anthropologists discovered that one of the first roles a culture played was the shared desire for survivability. Prior to the first common languages, acceptable and unacceptable practices were shared through cave drawings, providing stories in the form of graphical representations of how to keep safe in the face of danger.

Only within the past 15 to 20 years have we again begun to leverage cultures to enhance safety.

To establish an organizational culture that focuses on a

results orientation towards safety excellence, you first must assess and understand the existing foundation (systems, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and support). In the April 2010 article, "Seven Simple Steps to Assess Your Safety Culture," I described a proven strategy to culturally assess the safety element of your culture.

Relying on our culture for safety is a strategy as old as the first tribes in existence.

There are many simple, easily identifiable tactics that can improve safety, and there are a plethora of feel-good projects that a team could tackle. But which one presents the most effective leverage point, aligns others for change and becomes the new way we do things around here? An assessment of the culture should provide such transformational opportunities. Short-term successes are easy; thus the predominant, program-of-the-month perception throughout the world. Sustainability is the difficult part. This article will outline the vital strategies that have helped many organizations achieve and sustain safety excellence within their cultures.

OWNERSHIP

Cultures are not resistant to change; in fact, they change all the time. They are, however, resistant to change forced upon them. When the force subsides, often so will the change. Several years ago at an American Society for Safety Engineers Conference, Terry Mathis asked an audience, "How often do you wash a rental car?" The purpose of this question was to encourage others to identify the current ownership for safety in their organization. Why would employees be passionate about something that wasn't theirs, or something that was developed in which they had little creative input?

The French writer and aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry once wrote, "If you want to build a ship, then don't drum up men to gather wood, give orders and divide the work. Rather, teach them to yearn for the far and endless sea." If we are to be successful in the creation of a culture of excellence, we should take the same approach.

Many organizations utilize a structured representation of the culture (i.e., team, committee) to collectively decide on which leverage points to address and carry out developed action plans. Involving the people who perform the work, not only in the assessment, but also in the decisions to move forward in enhancing their culture, creates significant ownership in implementing culture enhancement. An assessment report serves as a figurative map of the current climate and culture; collaborative discussions can result in a practical journey map that presents the future, desired culture. This is essential to ensuring the change strategies fit your company, rather than making your company fit the strategies. If the strategies are not practical, they will not be carried out in practice.

ANCHOR THE CHANGE, FACILITATE SUPPORT

The integration of safety initiatives into the fabrics of organizational activities does not happen until it becomes culturally reinforced. The last thing to change in any program, process or training, is the culture. Only when this occurs will sustainability be possible. Make the change easy. Identify the organizational processes and systems that could potentially work

against the desired culture changes.

To be successful in culture change, an organization must develop and utilize individuals capable of leading and reinforcing the desired ideas, priorities and values. To accomplish this, many organizations have begun to develop safety roles, responsibilities and expectations for employees at all levels. The best approach is to ensure that RREs are behaviorally defined in collaboration between the supervisor and direct reports.

To guarantee change is becoming anchored and supported throughout the culture, realign the rewards, recognition and measurement systems to support the desired behaviors. This will be critical to ensure the desired behaviors are aligned with the evolving and enhancing culture.

DON'T GET COMPLACENT

To sustain excellence, we must facilitate passion within the newly enhanced culture. Create passion for

ownership by celebrating accomplishable short-term wins on a continuous basis. This moves the culture toward achieving success in safety, rather than the predominant failure-avoidance mentality that many current safety measurements propagate. This passion will be critical to ensure that the cultural foundation created does not crumble among the hypercompetitive nature of competing priorities. By enabling this passion throughout the organization, you create a community that continuously reinforces the ideal values and behaviors. It also aids in addressing the disruptors to excellence from within.

The definition of excellence is always expanding. When change is anchored within a culture, it must remain open and flexible. As a global society, there have been great strides in health, occupational and environmental safety. The description of excellence today may be viewed as archaic 20 years in the future. It is important to remain vigilant to ensure

a sense of cultural vulnerability and ward off one of the biggest threats to safety excellence: complacency.

Consider frequently reassessing your culture and applying these strategies on a continual basis. Sustainable excellence does not come in a one-time package; nor is it an easy, quick journey. It only is with passion for safety and with the understanding that risk is everywhere, that we can continue to enhance the safety of the individuals we work with and those they care about.

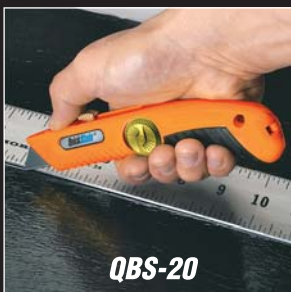
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Shawn M. Galloway is the president of ProAct Safety, an international safety excellence consulting firm. As an author, speaker and highly sought-after expert, he has assisted hundreds of organizations in achieving and sustaining excellence in safety, as well as other operational areas. Galloway also is the host of the weekly podcast series, Safety Culture Excellence. He can be reached at 936-273-8700 or info@ProActSafety.com.

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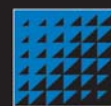


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