The FILM for A Cultural Snapshot

A famous philanthropist once told Gandhi that his goal was to help mankind. Realizing the impossible enormity of this goal, Gandhi asked, "Which one?"

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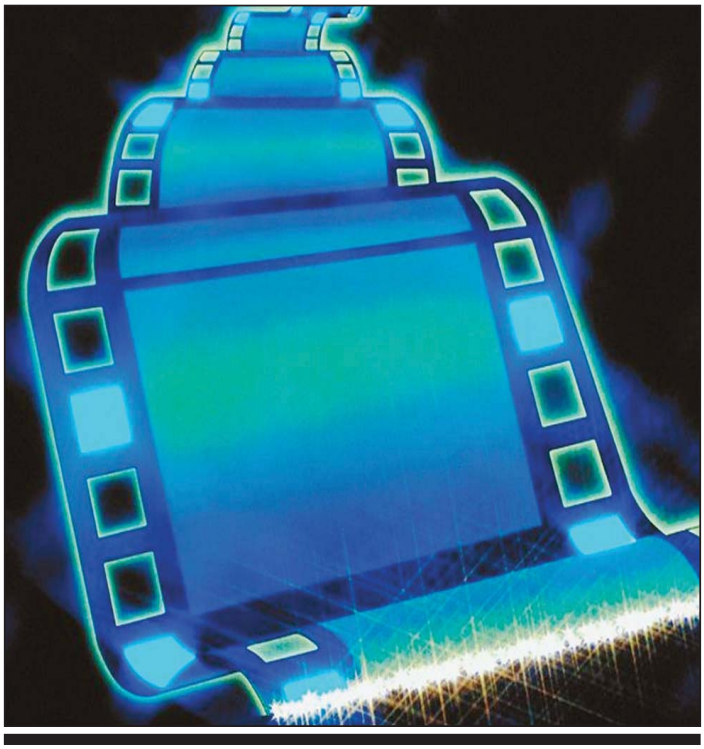

We have to approach safety the same way Gandhi approached helping mankind when our clients tell us their goal is to reduce accidents. "Improving safety" entails so much; it is important to determine where to focus first.

Hundreds of organizations and thousands of sites worldwide have benefitted by using a simple, four-part model to approach accident reduction. The model will improve results with no extra effort and address workplace behaviors and culture. Additionally, it will create a leading indicator of safety that will help to more proactively measure and manage results. We refer to this model as the FILM – to take snapshots of your safety culture and common practice.

FOCUS: If you asked your employees to focus on one thing to improve safety, what would it be? Would it improve safety and change the results that you currently are getting? If your focus in safety hasn't changed performance, you might not be focusing on the right things. Interview groups of employees and ask them, "What is your greatest risk?" or "What risk do you spend the most energy trying to avoid?" If you get too many answers, your workers' safety efforts are not focused.

Unfortunately, two problems are very common when developing a correct safety focus: kaizen (continuous, small improvements) and the standard classifications of accidents. Most organizations should not work on one small improvement, but a huge one. This school of thought is called "transformational thinking." The challenge is to discover the one thing that would improve safety most. However, overcoming "hand injuries" may still be too broad a goal. You might need to focus on "pinch points" or "hand-tool selection" or other, more specific issues that impact hand injuries. Rather than trying to improve safety in general, work on truly conquering this safety issue.

The enactment of the OSH Act in 1970 did a great deal to decrease incident rates. Now, however, many U.S. organizations have reached plateaus that represent a low level of accidents. Interestingly, most U.S. companies are putting forth the right amount of energy into safety. The next step in safety performance improvement will not come from additional energy; it will come from a continuous focus on the transformational.

Throwing resources at a problem was an accepted practice when the average company had dispensable resources available to them. Today, it has become critical to ensure improvement efforts are focused on value-add and efficiency. These criteria also will ensure that the results can be sustainable.

INFLUENCE: People do things for a reason. Change the reason, and you can change how people do their jobs.

The late quality gurus Dr. W. Edwards Deming and Joseph M. Juran dispelled the myth years ago that all problems would be solved if people just did their jobs well. People tend to do their jobs well when they are adequately trained,

appropriately supervised and have ergonomically engineered job stations and processes. Personal mistakes and deliberate risks also are a part of safety, but are influenced by reasons.

Organizations that align influences toward safety have better results than those who simply try to enforce compliance with safety standards. Kerry Patterson and his associates did a remarkable job shedding light on this topic in their 2007 book, Influencer.

LISTEN: I recently asked a supervisor why his workers performed a task a certain way. He responded that he didn't know and he wasn't sure how to find out that information. I shared with him a time-tested process that I have used: I walked up to an employee and asked him why he did the task that way. The worker spent the next 3 minutes giving me an insightful and thorough explanation that revealed a serious barrier to doing the job a safer way. The principle here is that employees often know why they do what they do, and you can know too if you simply ask and listen.

> If you asked your employees to focus on one thing to improve safety, what would it be?

Leading and directing employees is an important part of management and supervision. Listening is an equally important part that often is ignored. A true understanding of common practice and safety culture isn't simply discovering what people do, but why they do it.

The "why" part of this equation is where the true power to change things lies. When you get an employee to be safe in spite of the influences to take risks, you make progress. When you change the influences to take risks, you fix the problem for every employee who will do that job in the future. Some influences cannot be changed and must be addressed through difficult behavioral strategies. Identifying and addressing these also can leave a legacy of safety for future workers.

MEASURE: Recent articles and books have criticized safety measurements and how lagging indicators are inadequate for further improvement. The FILM model allows you to measure your progress toward a specific safety goal and to see how improving this goal impacts the lagging indicators of accidents (in the targeted category).

The metric simply is how much you have improved performance toward a target. As you improve your efforts, you can see the impact on your accident rates, severity, costs, etc. If you are focusing on a certain type of injury, this is where you should see results. The leading indicator tells you if you are working your plan, and the lagging indicator tells you if your plan is working to reduce your accidents. The multiple indicators allow for more effective diagnostics and faster corrections to safety improvement strategies.

Dictionary.com defines respond as "to react favorably," and it defines react as "to act in opposition, as against some force." To effectively be proactive in safety, an organization must respond to insight prior to reacting to an unplanned, undesired event. To achieve and sustain safety excellence, energy will need to be focused and influences must be understood and responded to by listening to the rationale for common practices.

Lastly, we must change the way we measure safety performance. If this model sounds too simple to work, remember that this is not a theory, nor proposal, but a proven model enacted worldwide. The remaining challenges are in the details of how to best make it fit your site and make it sustainable within your culture. EHS

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