

## The New Safety Strategy: Quit Preventing Accidents and Start Creating Value

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If your safety programs and strategy were a product, would your employees buy it?

If you charged a membership fee to participate in your safety programs, how many of your workers would voluntarily pay? The answer to this question is a glimpse into the perceived value of your safety efforts.

Too many safety programs view the worker as a problem that must be controlled. EHS professionals try to control workers through imposing rules and procedures, modifying their behavior, dictating the formation of their safety culture and attempting to get them engaged. But what if we viewed the workers as the customers of safety and tried to add value to their efforts by providing resources and programs that met or exceeded their safety needs?

The first step in this direction is to change the vision of the safety initiative from a compliance problem to a customer opportunity. Rather than trying to control and limit workers, the new safety strategy would be to market to them.

Marketing begins with research to determine customer wants, needs and possibilities. Most traditional safety efforts focus on organizational needs and how to get workers to meet them. The new safety strategy begins with analyzing what workers need in order to perform their jobs safely, rather than telling them what the organization expects of them. Once needs are determined, the organization can better align itself to meet those needs and identify influences that conflict with worker safety performance.

### Targeting Shared Value

Once the vision of the worker is changed from problem to client, safety can begin to target the creation of shared value. In business strategy, shared value is defined as social value plus economic value. This marriage of values answers the "what's-in-it-for-me" question for both the worker and the organization. The organization avoids all the economic and social costs of accidents, and the worker avoids both the pain and expense of work-related injury and can be motivated by involvement in this important effort. Shared value also forms the foundation for safety culture excellence by uniting the goals of workers and leaders. The "us vs. them" mentality of traditional safety is replaced with "all-of-us vs. the problem."

The strategy of safety changes its focus from preventing accidents to creating value. At first glance, this sounds like a dangerous distraction from the goal of safety rather than advanced thinking. But when the new strategy begins to take shape, organizations realize safety always has been accomplished by effort rather than subtraction.

When the strategy defines which efforts add value rather than what risk-taking needs to be eliminated, the risk-taking systematically gets replaced by proactive effort. In the minds of workers, safety becomes something you do rather than something you avoid. The effort is visible, whereas the lack of accidents or

even the avoidance of risks is less obvious. The lack of accidents becomes the result of very specific activities, which can be replicated next month and next year. The luck element in safety, which also can result in a short-term lack of accidents, no longer clouds the picture nor creates a false illusion of success.

As the strategy changes the goals of safety from stopping risks to starting value-add activities, there is another benefit. The tools to stop human behavior (policing, punishment and blame, etc.), while sometimes effective, potentially have a negative impact on relationships and culture. Organizational efforts to eliminate risk-taking behavior are fraught with such negative side effects: Trust levels often are low, making it difficult to create collaborative efforts. Avoidance behaviors abound, and motivation is stifled by the overall tone of avoiding failure rather than achieving success.

The tools to start specific human behavior, on the other hand, are builders of strong relationships and culture. Coaching and positive reinforcement bring workers together in their efforts and motivates the culture with positive scorekeeping and celebrations of success. Managers and supervisors can move from safety cop to coach, from enemy to ally.

Measuring the addition of value potentially is a discrete and insightful leading indicator of accidents, and is a positive vs. a negative metric, a measure of winning rather than losing less. Dozens of KPIs can be developed to measure value-add and these can be compared to the impact on lagging indicators to test overall effectiveness. The organization begins to measure what it wants and works to attain success rather than measuring what it does not want and working to avoid failure.

## **Aligning Safety and Business**

A value-add approach necessitates meaningful alignment between the safety strategy and the business strategy. All too often, these two strategies compete with each other for attention and priority when they could synergize to accomplish common additions of value. Organizations that have made the effort to align these strategies have discovered that, very often, good safety is good business and that a good business is a safe business. Safety professionals must become business professionals who specialize in safety, and business leaders must take the lead in developing safety excellence strategies as they do in other strategic aspects of operational excellence.

As efforts to add value to safety mature, another opportunity appears on the horizon. Competitive business strategists have realized there is an alternative to competing for the market share of a given product or service. This alternative is to go to the "blue ocean" and create a whole new product or service that exceeds customer needs and generates new marketplaces.

Steve Jobs said that no one knew they needed and iPhone until he made one. Your safety efforts to add value can become transformational when you develop new products or processes that workers may not realize they need until you roll them out.

This realization can energize safety efforts and turn them into innovative pursuits rather than the same dull efforts to lower failure rates. The leading edge of safety is the development of a safety strategy that seeks to add value rather than control, looks for innovations to add transformational potential for value and finally realizes that eliminating accidents is the byproduct of adding value and not the direct task at hand.

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