PRINCIPLE *to* PRACTICE

Follow the Blue Line
safety leadership topic

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Management Engagement
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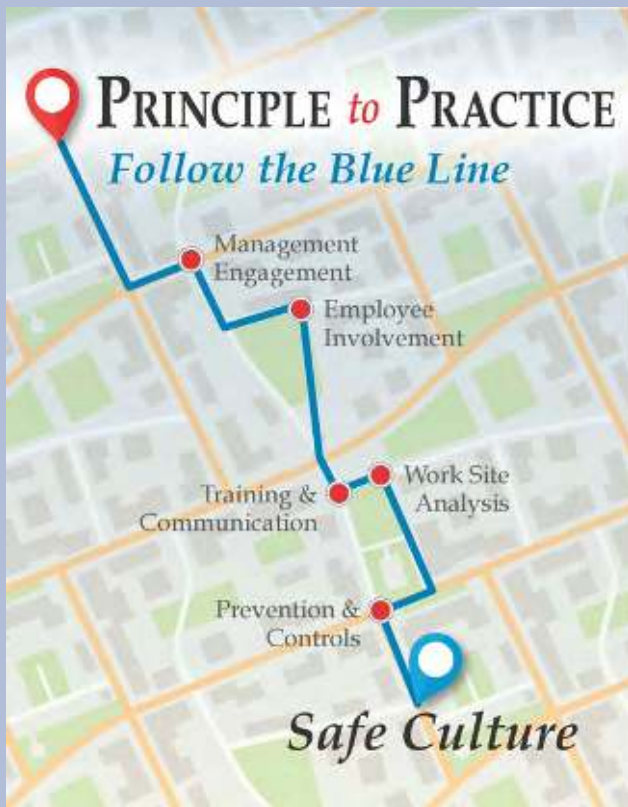
STAFFING | TRAINING | AUDITS

Setting Your Sights on Results Based Safety Leadership

Safety Character

Safety Mentality

Safety Results

Introduction
Setting Your Sights on Results-Based Safety Leadership

Most corporations claim to have safety as a value, but few companies deliver world-class safety performance. When I worked with OSHA as a compliance officer, company representatives would share with me what they "believed" about safety.

I heard common values such as, "Safety is a condition of employment," "Safety is everyone's responsibility," and "Training is essential to injury prevention and NO injury is acceptable!" Does all that sound familiar? Most companies have their version of these similar guiding principles.

Yet if most companies claim the same fundamental principles, why is there such a disparity in safety performance? Simple: Some companies lack the right safety character, mentality, and drive to achieve positive results. As an OSHA compliance officer, I observed companies with a comprehensive knowledge of fundamental safety concepts that did not (or could not) balance their intellectual safety knowledge with a "boots on the ground" reality. Conceptual safety is worthless without the ability to produce positive results.

Safety Character

My favorite quotes about character come from Coach John Wooden. He said, "Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are."

Wooden also said, "Ability may get you to the top, but it takes character to keep you there."

These statements amplify the importance of a fundamental value system that defines your organization and guides you through difficult decisions. Safety character is the pulse of your culture, and it sustains your success. The following three characteristics are a great start to help build character in your program.

> **Commitment:** Commitment is a not a casual attribute. To meet high expectations, commitment requires sacrifice. It is a dedication to your safety goals and it is a relentless pursuit of zero accidents. To realize the truest sense of the word "commitment," you have to demonstrate the characteristic with consistency and visibility. Words are meaningless; actions are everything.

> **Discipline:** Discipline compliments commitment, and it minimizes uncertainty in your culture. When employees see safety discipline in your organization, they clearly understand where the lines are, and the structured climate influences people to make safe decisions. There is no question about how, when, where, and why safety is important. Discipline elevates each employee's expectation to achieve success.

> **Urgency:** *Webster's Dictionary* defines urgency as:

> 1) Compelling immediate action; 2) Urging; pressing; besetting; plying, with importunity; calling for immediate attention; instantly important; 3) Being imperative, exigent or imperious; 4) Being instant or immediate; 5) Being important, earnest, serious or weighty; 6) Being critical or crucial.

In the context of safety character, leaders have to convey a sense of urgency about safety that mirrors the dictionary

definition. Safety calls for immediate action. Urgency with safety should feel like your team is fourth and inches from the goal line, determined to score. Injury prevention is the play that scores the touchdown.

These three safety character traits are not all inclusive, but they will help you build a foundation that will contribute to positive results. The question is: Would your coworkers say you demonstrate these characteristics?

Safety Attributes & Character			
Urgent	Disciplined	Accountable	Ethical
People-Oriented	High Expectations	Organized	Systematic
Consistent	Visible	Enthusiastic	Committed

The Right Safety Leader Mentality

When I refer to a safety leader, I am not talking about the guy that holds the "safety man" title. I am talking about operational leaders, managers, and line supervisors who influence behavior. They drive results in their areas of responsibility. All leaders have to manage work with a visible commitment to each employee's safety.

The right safety leader responds to their circumstances with an unwavering and unquestionable commitment to do things safely. There is no room for compromise.

Results-based safety leaders have a distinct mentality and attitude that demonstrate that they are determined to succeed. They think like winners. They take responsibility, and they drive achievements. They are not passive. They demonstrate the mentality described in the table below. Commitment, discipline, and urgency complement the right safety leader's mentality.

Results-Based Safety Mentality			
1	Focus relentlessly on "leading indicator" goals.	6	Experiment and innovate to improve safety.
2	Take complete responsibility for the group's safety results.	7	Measure the right safety standards with increasing rigor.
3	Do not make excuses or explain away the results.	8	Constantly take action.
4	Communicate expectations consistently and clearly.	9	Seek improvement feedback from others.
5	Do something personally to improve the safety results.	10	Model the methods you want your group to put into practice.

Top 10 Desired Safety Results

A game plan gives you the insight to win, but you cannot know who won without a score. You do not know how your players performed unless you keep statistics. A strategic system to evaluate people with clear and quantifiable measures will instill accountability.

As a leader with the right safety mentality, you have to fight against the inclination to define safety results in ambiguous terms. My three sons – Caleb, Jacob, and Luke – provide a practical example of ambiguous results. If I ask them how they are doing in school, what response do you think I get? They communicate in one-word sentences: good, fine, OK. What does that tell me? If I want to know how they performed in school, I have to look at their work. Every test has a score; every project has a grade. The rewards and consequences for grades motivate my boys to perform, and I cannot accept general descriptions.

Weak safety cultures define their results with vague measures. They cannot identify their weak performers, because they do not quantify their safety engagement.

When I worked with OSHA, I often found inadequate

descriptions of safety performance. When I asked employers to describe their safety performance, some people responded with vague answers: fine, OK, good. Strong safety cultures avoid these traps. They keep score of critical leading indicators, and they demand visible management participation. When you ask someone in a strong safety culture about the facility's performance, he or she will define the facility's status in clear measurements. The Safety Manager knows the weak and strong leaders because their contributions are quantified.

For example, if audits are required, track audit participation and measure the quality of the audits. If an organization values sustained corrective action, track the number of repeat observations for each audit. If a program requires supervisors to perform prejob briefs (PJB), track the quality and participation in the PJB process. The records become a results-based performance measurement.

True accountability means that you find the right motivation to drive your desired results. This is a perfect opportunity to instill expectations, urgency, and discipline into your program.

So what do you hope to gain? What is the desired outcome? Where do you start? The table below provides food for thought. Measure the visibility and participation of your leaders.

The key question is, "What quantifiable results do you want?"

Top 10 Desired Safety Results			
1	Set and achieve aggressive improvement goals for injury rates.	6	Schedule, track, and monitor manager participation in orientations.
2	Perform a minimum of one audit per week per manager and supervisor.	7	Schedule and deliver ALL required training with manager visibility.
3	Achieve aggressive improvement goals with scored audits.	8	Attend a minimum of one safety meeting per week. (ALL employees)
4	Track and monitor manager participation in investigations.	9	Conduct a minimum of one safety performance review a week.
5	Track and monitor daily manager participation in prejob briefs.	10	Track and monitor response time for corrective actions.

The right safety character and mentality fuels the engine to deliver results, but every organization has to define and communicate what they want to achieve. You have to balance your intellectual understanding of safety with a "boots on the ground" reality. Conceptual safety is worthless without the ability to motivate and produce results. Does your organization have the right balance?

This book describes the general processes, procedures, practices, and techniques that will help your company execute exceptional safety performance with the right safety character, mentality, and desired results. The purpose of this strategic plan is to implement proven principles and practices that will build an exceptional safety culture. This plan identifies strategies that companies can use to execute strategic safety requirements that will drive peak safety performance.

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