

# THE POWER OF STRUCTURE

## The Strategic Safety Plan

By David G. Lynn

**I love football season. Stadium lights and freshly cut grass in the fall make me think about football. Growing up, my friends and I participated in organized leagues and we played in the backyard. No matter which venue, our competitive nature was evident in both settings.**

**However, there were differences** between a backyard game and a Friday night high school game. They required different levels of dedication and commitment. When we played a friendly game of football in the backyard, we maintained the core philosophy of the game, but our adherence to the rules was more liberal. The games were unregulated and it was the survival of the fittest. They lacked the structure and discipline that organized football requires.

Structure and discipline in organized sports taught me the finer points of the game. Coaches molded my personality, rules taught me to appreciate fair competition, dedication to practice enabled my success and teamwork molded my character. All of these elements helped me learn to value the game and experience the rewards of my hard work. In essence, the structure of organized football created an environment with character, commitment and dedication, or a culture with clear expectations for the team.

Many companies approach safety like a backyard game where they make up the rules as they go. They have a competitive spirit but there is no discipline to the program that drives success. They lack teamwork, direction and boundaries for their program. The “backyard” safety culture does not experience the value of true dedication and hard work. However, companies can improve their own safety cultures if they recognize the difference and transition their organization into a structured team with focus and direction.

Just like organized sports, companies with structure and discipline in their safety cultures have the ability to teach employees the finer points of safety. The structure molds the culture, mentors teach the value of safety and the rules help everyone to appreciate safety success. Commitment enables achievement and it relies on teamwork. In essence, a structured, disciplined safety program creates an evolving tradition or a culture with clear expectations for managers and employees.

What does a structured, disciplined program look like? Successful safety cultures find a way to put fundamental safety principles into practice. In a successful safety culture, management commitment is important and employee involvement is essential. Professionals recognize how important it is to analyze work, put controls in place and train employees. But the principles are half the story. Leaders must know how they will tactically put these principles into practice. Just like organized sports, you must have a game plan and strategy that puts principle into practice. The strategic safety plan should include several elements: management commitment and visibility, employee involvement, work site analysis, training and communication, and prevention and controls.

### Management Commitment & Visibility

Safety commitment does not exist without a strong and consistent management presence in the workplace. The goal for this plan is to define clear ways that the management team and supervisors can demonstrate their commitment with strategic visible action. The following management safe habits will produce safe work and positive safety results:

**1) Daily preshift meetings:** Each area conducts a preshift meeting and safety is at the top of the agenda. These meetings are a strategic opportunity for the project manager and staff to be visible in the safety discussion.

*Goal:* 100% management engagement. The project manager and staff should monitor the quality of the safety discussion in the meetings and both should provide input for how to make the topics proactive and effective.

**2) Weekly safety audits:** The audit strategy should focus on consistent participation, frequent walkthroughs, fundamental coaching, standard protocols, consistent follow-through with corrective action and performance-minded accountability with results.

*Goal:* 100% accountability for results. The project manager and staff will par-

ticipate in the weekly audits and drive the process. This is a strategic opportunity to demonstrate high expectations for results. Repeat audit items should carry consequences.

**3) Incident investigations:** The project manager and staff will continue to be highly engaged in the incident investigation process. For recordable incidents or severe near-hits, both groups will participate in interviews and area walkthroughs to ensure results and identify all root causes.

*Goal:* Influence the future. Elevate visibility by participating in the details of the process such as area walkthroughs and employee interviews. Following through with corrective action across the project is also a critical area of focus.

**4) Corrective action:** Establish a process to track all open items for incidents. Assign target dates, responsibility and monitoring expectations.

*Goal:* Drive sustainable solutions. The project manager and staff should meet at least monthly to discuss corrective action follow-through. They will also evaluate how effectively corrective action measures have been implemented and sustained throughout the plant.

**5) Improvement initiatives:** Safety progress requires focus on the trends. The safety steering team can provide support and direction for safety committees and managers to systematically address trends with communications, training, auditing and engineering controls.

*Goal:* Solve specific problems that impact performance. Focus on the problems and generate sustainable solutions.

### Employee Involvement

**1) Hazard identification:** Employees need a clear method for identifying and correcting hazards. The hazard identification process is not just about creating a list of things for maintenance to do. The process should encourage employees to take action and correct the things they control. The process should be visible and simple.

*Goal:* Find and fix problems. Develop a hazard identification process that focuses on what employees can control. Use the process as a way to coach and mentor employees to look for and correct risk.

**2) Safety teams:** The safety teams should report through a formal structure. Establish a safety steering team that manages the different safety committees. The goal for the safety steering team is to direct, monitor and support the safety committee structure. All team activities should focus on safety performance improvement. They should have a strategy that includes a list of prioritized projects.

*Goal:* 100% employee engagement. Develop a structured safety team organization that meets consistently and addresses safety performance problems strategically. Get employees involved with the solutions.

**3) Approaching others:** All employees need to feel comfortable approaching others about safety hazards. This is one of the most important elements of a program. Once people actively help each other in the area of safety, performance begins to improve.

*Goal:* Protect each other. Develop a 12-month strategy for how the project will promote this idea. The strategy should include training, communications and consistent face-to-face promotion.

**4) Audit participation:** Utilize audits as an opportunity to coach and mentor employees. Audit participation is also an opportunity for employees to explain where the problems are. Use audits to identify risk and promote teamwork.

*Goal:* Coach and mentor employees. Tag team audits with management and employees. Utilize the strengths of the entire organization.

**5) Mentoring program:** Employees are most at risk when they are first hired. New hires are also more likely to ask a fellow employee questions. A good mentoring program identifies natural leaders in the workforce and trains them to be a safety advocate. As the mentor, they have an opportunity to help new employees learn to perform work safely.

*Goal:* Empower natural leaders to make an impact on new employees. Develop a safety mentoring program that identifies natural leaders and equips them to coach new employees about safety. The program should include ways



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to make the process highly visible. There should also be a process for evaluating new employees based on standard safety expectations.

### Work Site Analysis

**1) Audits:** The site currently has multiple methods for auditing work. An opportunity exists to look at all methods and streamline them into an effective overall process. The safety audit strategy should focus on consistent participation, frequent walkthroughs, fundamental coaching, standard protocols, consistent follow-through with corrective action and performance-minded accountability with results.

*Goal:* Audit elements that impact compliance and performance. The project manager and staff will participate in the weekly audits and drive the process. All layers of the organization should participate.

**2) Incident investigations:** Every incident investigation should focus on how to influence the future and focus less on how to punish the past. A good investigation program identifies root causes and provides recommendations for eliminating the hazards. Good investigators have root-cause training and they utilize the skill often.

*Goal:* Equip people with the tools to perform good investigations. Ensure that the team is investigating near-hits and recordable incidents.

**3) Pretask planning:** One of the most effective ways to prevent incidents is to teach people to anticipate the risk. Good pretask planning requires employees to think through the steps of a job, identify potential injuries and put preventive measures in place.

*Goal:* Get employees to think "What if?" Develop and implement a formal pretask planning process. The initial process

will focus on maintenance-related work and projects.

**4) Equipment inspections:** Safe habits include requirements for employees to inspect the tools and equipment they use. The process should be consistent and frequent.

*Goal:* 100% compliance with audits. Audit all processes that require employees to inspect equipment. This includes manufacturing equipment, cord and plug equipment, rigging equipment, ladders, cranes/hoists, electrical PPE, forklifts and fire extinguishers. The goal is to ensure that employees take this process seriously.

**5) Analyze trends (audits and injuries):** Treat safety trends just as you would a quality trend. Once you know that certain incidents happen more frequently, determine why and put a plan in place to correct the situation. Utilize all available tools to train, communicate and monitor results.

*Goal:* Reverse the trends.

## Training & Communication

**1) New-hire orientation:** Orientation is the only opportunity to make a first impression on a new hire. The process should deliver information that covers regulatory requirements and provide relevant safety information. The delivery method should include instructor-led elements as well as video support. Participants should also take a comprehension test.

*Goal:* Make a positive safety impression. Senior leaders should express their commitment to safety in the orientations. Give tours when possible and make sure employees know the basic safety requirements.

**2) Regulatory training:** Maintain an annual regulatory training schedule that includes all required OSHA training. The delivery method should include instructor-led elements as well as video support. Participants should also take a comprehension test. When possible, utilize subject-matter experts and safety professionals for the training. If that is not possible, conduct train-the-trainer sessions with employees who will conduct the training later.

*Goal:* Deliver good material effectively. Employees must comprehend the topics so that they can apply the principles.

**3) Safety leadership training:** Great programs equip all levels of the organization to perform day-to-day safety-related tasks. Safety leadership training should teach department managers, coordina-

tors and team leaders topics such as why safety is important, safety responsibilities, preplanning techniques, hazard identification, communication skills and root-cause analysis.

*Goal:* Teach leaders how to make a huge impact on safety. Establish a schedule and agenda for conducting safety leadership training consistently throughout the year. Anyone who directs employees should go through the training.

**4) Weekly safety topics:** Team leads should deliver relevant weekly topics. Employees should apply the principles of the weekly topics in their work areas. Team leads should document employee participation.

*Goal:* Constantly communicate a relevant safety message. Managers and coordinators should be visible in the process and team leads should encourage feedback in these meetings.

**5) Strategic safety communications:** A safety communications plan should include methods for promoting messages verbally, in writing and visually. The plan should focus on safety-performance-related topics and plant safety expectations.

*Goal:* Employees should see and hear a safety message everywhere they turn. Develop a plan that keeps safety fun but focuses on key initiatives and performance.

## Prevention & Controls

**1) Strategic safety plan:** A strategic safety plan defines how and what you want to do to improve safety performance. The plan should include safe habits that produce safe work. The plan should also provide quantitative ways to measure performance.

*Goal:* Plan your success. To experience peak safety performance, you have to identify the path you will take and drive progress. The plan should be on paper and progress should be easy to track.

**2) Rules and programs:** OSHA requires companies to have specific programs and rules in place. Employees should know the required programs and rules, and they should be enforced consistently. Compliance with programs and rules measures safety commitment.

*Goal:* Follow and enforce the rules relentlessly. Evaluate current “absolutes”

and determine whether they are aligned with the direction the project should take. Make appropriate changes and create an absolute pathway for compliance to the rules.

**3) Corrective action programs:** Establish a process to track all open items for incidents. Assign target dates, responsibility and monitoring expectations.

*Goal:* Eliminate the issue. The project manager and the staff should meet at least monthly to discuss corrective action follow-through. They will also evaluate how effectively corrective action measures have been implemented and sustained throughout the plant.

**4) Case management:** When an injury happens at work, it is extremely important for the project team to stay involved with the treatment for the employee. The team should take a hands-on approach to the process to ensure that the employee is properly taken care of.

*Goal:* Ensure appropriate treatment.

**5) Annual review:** The safety puzzle has many pieces. Each year, the project team should perform an annual review to ensure that it is following all regulatory and corporate requirements. The process should also score leadership safe habits and safe work.

*Goal:* Recalibrate and identify areas for improvement.

## Conclusion

Putting safety principles into practice represents the structure and discipline required to succeed. This is how an organization demonstrates its commitment to safety. A structured plan establishes a positive culture with shared attitudes, values, goals and practices that characterize a company's reputation. The applied principles are the difference between a backyard football game and an organized team. Every employee has an obligation to understand these principles and make them highly visible throughout the organization. Cultures rely on the collective influence of every individual to support the team. I challenge you to champion the cause in your work environment. Your commitment to your culture today influences tomorrow's results. **PSJ**

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