



BY DAVID LYNN, CSP

VICE PRESIDENT OF SIGNATURE SERVICES,
LIFE AND SAFETY CONSULTANTS

WALK

THE TALK

BUILDING A CULTURE REQUIRES PLANNING, ACCOUNTABILITY AND VISIBILITY

Put your passion for safety into practice with visible commitment. The secret to building a winning culture begins with you! When individuals model a passion and conviction to achieve zero injuries, organizations excel in safety. No matter where you fit into an organizational chart, you influence those around you, and this translates to a winning culture.

Leaders have to make their commitment visible. A personal dedication to safety does not exist if one does not display commitment with visible, consistent action. Your actions are a reflection of what you believe about safety.

I want to offer three techniques that organizations can incorporate to visibly exhibit commitment and build your safety culture. Your commitment will not exist without consistent and visible reinforcement of each technique.

Technique #1: Project Planning

A true injury-free culture applies visible management commitment through consistent methods of execution. Preparation enables the work group to adjust to the unexpected and react with precision.

You have to know how you will train workers, analyze work, adapt to changing conditions and control risks in all phases of the work. Consistent planning visibly shows the workforce the level of commitment that management places on achieving a safe and healthy outcome.

Workers and managers in successful safety cultures develop specific safety and health plans and back-up plans that help execute work safely and help mitigate catastrophes. A thorough plan minimizes the pressure to take shortcuts that lead to injuries, and a comprehensive plan sets the safety expectations for the project. A good safety and health plan provides defenses for known hazards, anticipates the unknown and answers questions before someone has to ask.



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Technique #2: Measured Accountability

A strategic system to evaluate people will drive improvement and instill accountability. A scorecard gives you a method to integrate urgency into an individual's daily expectations.

What does it mean to “hold” someone accountable for safety and to “keep score” on their performance? This is often a deficient part of safety programs because leaders wait until something bad happens before they feel the need to hold anyone accountable. A negative event is already too late to hold someone accountable for safety. The answer is simple: set standards for people, measure the results and either recognize or discipline based on the findings. Do all this routinely and consistently.

For example, if audits are required, track audit participation and measure the quality of audits. If your organization values sustained corrective action, track the number of repeat observations on each audit. If your program requires supervisors to perform preshift safety meetings, track the quality

and participation in the process. The records become a performance measurement. The process of accountability provides for a perfect opportunity to instill expectations, urgency and discipline into your program.

If your organization does not keep detailed individual scores for safety, you will experience an adjustment period when you introduce the idea. I learned this lesson the hard way.

At a previous employer, I developed a scorecard that tracked management participation in four categories. I tracked audit participation, safety team support, safety meeting completion and safety procedure reviews. Each supervisor and manager had responsibilities and I documented their performance. I gave them a score for each item and I rolled up the scores into a final score. Then, I stack-ranked each leader from the best to the worst. I highlighted the top ten percent in green and the bottom ten percent in red.

After the report was complete, I distributed the report to the leadership team. The process sounds reasonable, right? The score showed who followed through with their responsibilities and who did not. That is the type of accountability you need because it tells you who deserves a reward and who needs urgent “motivation.” After all, safety is a condition of employment. You have to know the score, and the score has to mean something.

My plant manager was in the red! The system was awesome because it measured management commitment with visible tools that have been proven over time to drive safety success. The backlash was predictable. When my plant manager reviewed the results, he came to my office in a bad mood. He was not happy and my scorecard had a short lifespan. Somehow, I managed to keep my job.

Where did I go wrong? My mistake was that I did not communicate the purpose and intent of the scorecard well, and I embarrassed important people. In reality, my plant manager always supported safety and I enjoyed working for him, but I failed to properly explain the rules of the game. The moral of the story is that you have to develop your scorecards as a team to gain the greatest value. The goal, of course, is for leaders to embrace measurement techniques and play to win. The prize is a quality of life for your employees.

Technique #3: Strategic Visibility

When is safety commitment real?

Safety commitment does not exist without visibility. The commitment becomes real when leaders develop obsessions about critical safety processes. Leaders can demonstrate their conviction in strategic ways. Where do you spend your time? The most critical point you need to remember about strategic visibility is that it does not have to cost money. Your presence in the right safety-related processes demonstrates what is important to you. Employees have to see your obsession!

For example, new employees form opinions in the first couple of hours they are onsite. This is a perfect opportunity for site managers to set the safety tone by meeting with them. Take the opportunity to communicate safety expectations in person. Intentional interaction with employees during safety meetings, pre-job meetings and audits, show an employee that safety is important to you. Ask safety-related questions. Workers know your interest by the questions you ask. When leaders balance management participation with decisive action, they visibly demonstrate that safety is important.

Sample questions you can ask:

1. What are the critical steps in your job?
2. What is the worst thing that could happen?
3. How do you prevent the “worst” thing from happening?
4. How can I help you prevent a potential injury?
5. Do you feel like you get the proper safety training?
6. Do you feel like you get the proper instructions to perform tasks safely?
7. Do you feel comfortable stopping work if a hazard is present?
8. How do people around you demonstrate their commitment to safety?
9. Do you have the appropriate tools to complete your work safely?
10. Do you believe that all incidents (injuries, near misses, first aid, etc.) can be prevented?
11. Is there anything safety-related you would like for me to evaluate?
12. If you could make one safety improvement, what would you do?

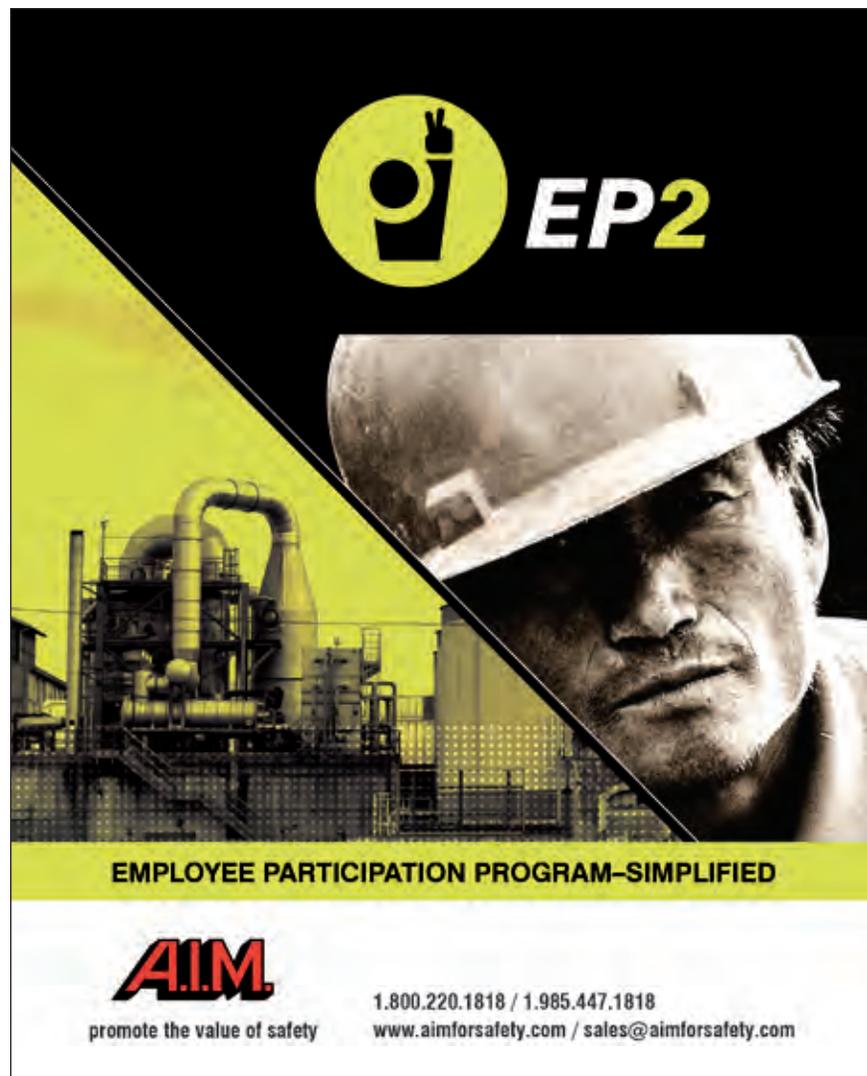
Conclusion

Visible management commitment is the cornerstone to building a successful safety culture, and it is a mark that distinguishes a culture. Our words and actions project our commitment, and we have to ask ourselves difficult questions requiring honest reflection on our approach to safety. These reflections are important to discovering a true commitment to safety. All of our actions and the techniques we implement, represent a footprint for safety. We project an image, whether we like it or not. How would your coworkers describe your focus on safety? You have opportunities every day to demonstrate you believe an injury-free culture is possible. 

Reference

Principle to Practice by David G. Lynn, CSP

DAVID G. LYNN, CSP, is vice president of Signature Services, a division of Life & Safety Consultants. He is also professional speaker, published author and improvement strategist with 20 years of experience. David has authored books such as *Principle to Practice* and *Strategic Safety Plan*. Both books help readers develop execution plans that put VPP principles to practice. David utilizes these proven principles to help clients achieve their safety goals. For resources and assistance, you can go to www.lifeandsafety.com or www.david-lynn.com.



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