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*Thomas "Torrey" Hawkins
Founder & President, Angler Construction*

Managers Manage Things, Leaders Lead People

3 essential elements of a world-class safety program



JOHN J. MEOLA, CSP, ARM, is the safety director for Pillar Inc. in Richmond, Virginia. He has extensive experience in developing and implementing construction and industrial safety programs. Meola is a part-time instructor of occupational safety at Virginia Commonwealth University and serves as treasurer of the Colonial Virginia Chapter of the American Society of Safety Engineers. He is the author of *The Construction Safety Guide* and *The Forklift Safety Guide*. He is an OSHA 500 Outreach construction trainer in English and Spanish and presents webinars. Contact Meola at jmeola@pillaroma.com and visit pillaroma.com.

Are you still using Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) metrics as your safety standard? Do you plan on being in this business 5, 10 or 20 years from now? If you answered yes to both, you have a value conflict. Why accept some random statistical average composed of questionable data as your standard when it is more effective to create personalized best practices and performance metrics?

Some global giants in the construction industry tossed out the OSHA rule book, regarding it as marginally applicable for their intended purpose, and set up their own standard of performance to achieve zero safety incidents.

Today's growing workforce is increasingly comprised of millennials. The study of industrial and organizational psychology that delineates the millennial demographic is called "affective behavior," which recognizes that people are individually very different, with an increasingly broad range of freedoms and avenues of expression.

Some examples are easy to identify—preferred clothing style, hair geometry, facial ornamentation, etc.—but the thought processes that accompany these affective manifestations can be a bit more complex.

This new workforce of millennials tends to be better educated, more expressive, less accepting of authority, self-directed and highly connected with social media, among other attributes. Recent studies indicate that United States worker productivity is at

a record-high level. This means that leadership must uniformly and conscientiously recognize workers' achievements, as individuals and as groups.

In the workplace, characteristics of safety leadership for this group should accommodate a wider range of motivations and incentives.

For example, in safety meetings and communications, the message should focus not on the hazard, cost or risk of penalty for unsafe behavior, but rather on why doing the right thing is in the worker's best interest.

Generally, organizational safety performance will be highly correlated to employee perception of their role in the safety process, their interactions with the program and system feedback on their achievements. Consider the following three key elements that affect program outcomes.

1. DEFINED ROLES

One important element of a successful business safety program is the clear definition of roles within the project. Specific roles and their respective duties you should consider include:

Project Management Role

- Confirm equipment is in safe, operating condition.
- Ensure work is completed:
 - o to specification
 - o ahead of schedule
 - o under budget
 - o without injury or incident

Leadership Role

- Recognize people, their diversity and achievements.
- Offer sincere praise in public and constructive coaching in private.
- Delegate tasks.
- Lead by example:
 - Wear the proper personal protective equipment (PPE).
 - Show up for the safety meeting, even if you do not speak every time.
 - Turn off your phone in meetings.

Practicing effective leadership on a job-site can be surprisingly straightforward. Sincerity and honesty are valuable to the members of your team. Leadership is best displayed on a routine basis, such as in regular safety meetings or training exercises. When a crisis arises, it becomes even more important, especially when you have an ownership stake in the outcome. Translation: True leadership must start at the highest levels of your organization.

2. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

When applied correctly, continuous improvement is arguably the greatest contributor to the safety process. To affect meaningful change, managers need to create buy-in from team members by having them help with innovation. To achieve this, managers can foster innovation subtly, ideally when the innovation arises from within the group itself. Begin with simple things, such as tools, hardware, PPE, appliances, lighting, etc. Keep in mind that affective behavior is operating in the background of any movement toward change.

Continuous integration of electronic apps for practically every task, digital measuring instruments, cellphone cameras, GPS tracking, drone surveys, telemetry, virtual reality, building information modeling and others, offer proof that innovation,



when understood properly, can be welcome. The task of figuring out how to apply these new improvements to enhance safety belongs to the third element.

3. EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT

When combined with the previous two elements, employee involvement will help put your safety program over the top, but it can be tricky to pull off at first because it involves social interaction and communication, which most people are practiced in avoiding.

However, it is extremely effective at creating ownership in the safety process. Leadership, engagement, delegation of responsibility and accountability are involved. Use leadership skills to ask for feedback and show you are open and welcoming of new ideas.

The levels of involvement can be passive, such as anonymous, close-call reports and suggestion programs, as well as active within a fully functioning safety committee. Your employees can make an important contribution to the organization when given proper opportunities.

There is room for employee involvement in activities, such as:

- New employee safety orientations
- Training in specialty disciplines (fall protection, lockout-tagout, confined-space entry, etc.)
- Training in cross-skills transfer
- Inspections of jobsites, shop, yard, equipment, fleet, etc.
- Controlled experiments and trials for PPE and seasonal gear
- Participation in job hazard preparation
- Coaching observations
- Process evaluations
- Critical appraisals

Ultimately, should you aspire to bid on coveted requests for proposal, you will be examined on the stringency of your safety program.

Because third parties will likely play a pivotal role in the vaunted \$1 trillion infrastructure rebuild, private finance also demands the assurance of accident-free performance. For a preview of what the future of safety will look like, visit the safety sections of the Fluor (fluor.com) and DPR Construction (dpr.com) websites. These and several other major players in the industry are often open to sharing their processes, methods and findings. **CBO**