

People-Based Leadership: Gaining and Sustaining Engagement in Occupational Safety

**E. Scott Geller, Ph.D.
Senior Partner, Safety Performance Solutions
Alumni Distinguished Professor, Virginia Tech**

People-based safety (Geller, 2005) is an extension and evolution of behavior-based safety (Geller 2001; Krause, Hidley, & Hodson 1996; McSween 2003) which has been found to significantly reduce industrial injuries (Sulzer-Azaroff & Austin 2000). The components of people-based safety are reflected by the acronym – ACTS. Specifically, in a Total Safety Culture, people **Act** to protect themselves and each other from unintentional injury, **Coach** themselves and one another to identify barriers to safe acts and provide constructive behavior-based feedback, **Think** in ways that activate and support safe behavior, and focus and scan strategically to **See** hazards and at-risk behaviors.

The ACTS vision for a Total Safety Culture is easier said than done. Specific leadership principles and strategies are needed to empower a work force to become self-accountable for injury prevention and actively care for the safety and health of others. This is “people-based leadership” (PBL) and is the theme of the present paper. The author contributed two prior ASSE PDC papers on leadership, each subsequently published in *Professional Safety*. Each of these includes principles of PBL and warrant a brief review here. There is significant overlap between these prior papers and the current discussion, but this paper is more practical and prescriptive.

The author’s first leadership presentation for the ASSE PDC (Geller 1999) distinguished between managers who hold people accountable and leaders who inspire people to be responsible or self-accountable. While managers are assigned their supervisory position, leaders earn their role through interpersonal interaction. Everyone can be a leader, including managers.

The focus of that presentation was the description of ten leadership qualities needed for the achievement of an injury-free workplace. While these principles are only listed here, many will resurface later in this PBL essay. Specifically, in 1998 the author (Geller 1999) proposed that effective leaders:

1. Focus on process (or the behaviors needed to achieve an injury-free workplace).
2. Accompany training with education (in order to provide a reasonable rationale for certain safety instructions).
3. Use conditional statements (that allow for relevant refinement to fit a particular context).
4. Listen first (to learn the other person’s perspective before offering direction, advice or support).
5. Promote ownership (by giving conditional directives and allowing others to customize safety-related procedure to achieve desired outcomes).
6. Encourage personal choice (thereby increasing participation and self-accountability).

7. Set expectations rather than mandates (in order to increase self-direction and self-accountability for safety-relevant behaviors).
8. Are confident but uncertain of process details (realizing the process-relevant workers know better than they what hazards must be eliminated or avoided and what safety-related behaviors must be improved).
9. Look beyond the numbers (acknowledging management requires measurement but realizing unmeasured human dimensions like self-esteem, optimism and belongingness need attention).
10. Make more distinctions between people (thereby disabling stereotyping and appreciating the unique interests, talents and attributes of individuals).

Leadership for World-Class Safety

The author's second *Professional Safety* publication on leadership (Geller 2006) critically analyzed conclusions reported in Jim Collins' national best-seller *Good to Great* (Collins 2001). Briefly, while Collins claims the great companies have hired the best people and put them in positions that match their interests and talents, this author argues that effective leadership can help people improve their work-related attitudes and behaviors. For example, when an employee's behavior does not meet designated expectations, a corrective action plan can be implemented following candid conversation and a personal commitment to improve or change jobs.

Great leaders bring out the best in people by showing them the intrinsic consequences of their meaningful work, thereby inspiring them to be self-accountable. To do this, they: 1) are humble; 2) acknowledge the contributions of others; 3) accept personal responsibility for failure; 4) promote a learning culture; 5) demonstrate optimistic success-seeking over pessimistic failure-avoiding; 6) make rigorous and discriminating, rather than ruthless and indiscriminate, personal decisions, and 7) encourage self-motivation. The remainder of this paper expands on these principles and offers some practical ways to bring them to life.

The LEAD Acronym

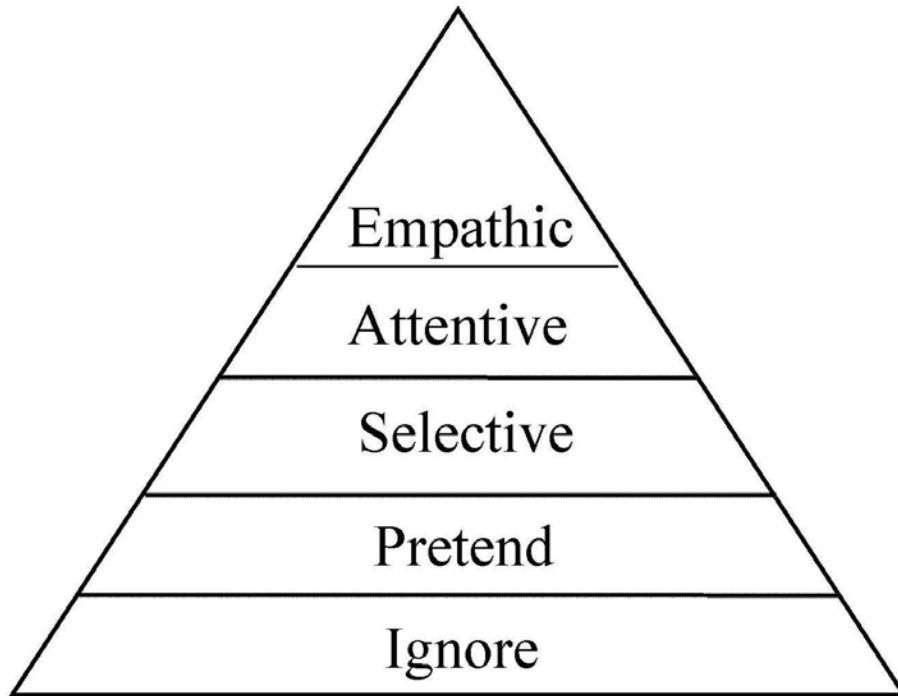
The author has used acronyms throughout his teaching career to help students remember key principles. Here he organizes key PBL lessons and strategies around a memorable memory aid—LEAD. Each letter of this noun and action verb reflects key qualities of leaders, and implies specific behaviors needed to improve leadership. Thus, it is hoped readers will use LEAD to remember the essence of these PBL leadership lessons, and teach the principles to others.

Leadership and Other “L” Words

Listen

As depicted in Figure 1, listening occurs at five hierarchical levels, including ignoring, pretending, selective, active and empathic. Selective listening—hearing what we want to hear—is the most common. The best listening—empathic listening—is probably least common.

Figure 1: The 5 Levels of Listening



Leaders attempt to listen actively, hearing both good and bad news. They put aside their biases and pay attention to everything in a communication. The most effective leaders listen with empathy by considering the communication from the presenter's perspective. Before stating their viewpoint or opinion, they communicate respect for the speaker's words and emotions, and ask relevant questions. As Dr. Stephen Covey puts it, "They seek first to understand before being understood" (Covey 1989).

Live, Learn, Love and Leave a Legacy

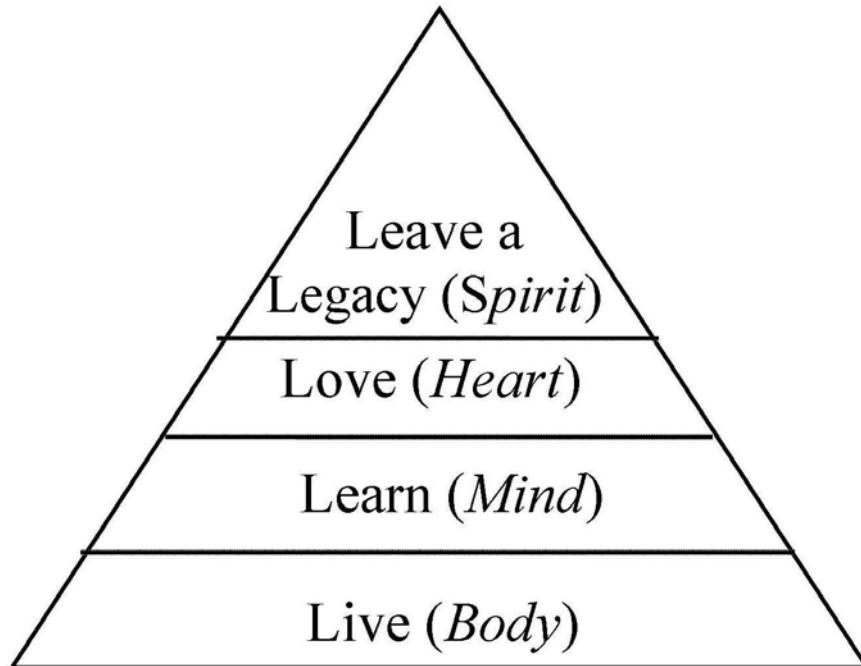
Dr. Covey also advocated these four hierarchical L-words which reflect stages of human life and help us understand people's motivations (see Figure 2 on the next page). Empathic leaders learn the life phases of their followers, and thereby know what consequences turn them on and which can be used to improve their work performance.

Workers at the "living" stage are "working to live," and want to receive fair financial compensation for their behavior. Of course, all employees' desire appropriate financial consequences for their work, but some are also motivated by opportunities to learn. And through relevant learning, these individuals get promoted to more challenging positions. Some learn to love their job and adopt the mindset of "living to work."

As people mature and consider the end of their lives, many contemplate their life accomplishments and wonder how they helped to make the world a better place. In his best seller, *The Seven Habits of Effective People*, Covey (1989) suggests we imagine our own funeral and the speeches of four individuals, one from our immediate family, our friends, our work or profession, and our church or community organization to which we contribute voluntary service. "What would you like each of these speakers to say about you and your life?" (p. 97).

What could be more meaningful and emotionally fulfilling than working to prevent personal injury and saving lives? Safety leaders leave a legacy.

Figure 2: The Covey Hierarchy of Needs (adapted from Covey, 2004)



“E” Words for Leadership

The subtitle of a recent book on teaching the author recently edited with Phil Lehman is *Energy, Empathy, and Engagement in the Classroom* (Geller & Lehman 2007). We derived these E-words from a content analysis of the 39 essays in this book. The best university teachers are energetic and empathic, and thereby activate engagement among their students.

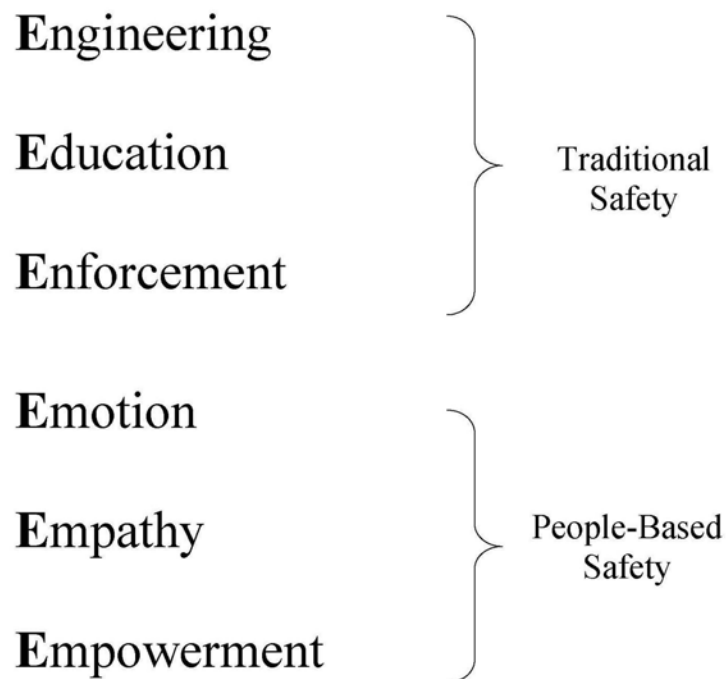
The same is true for leaders. The best safety leaders are enthusiastic and passionate, and they show respect and appreciation for the people they lead. Leaders understand the power of positive behavioral consequences, and are constantly searching for ways to reward and support desirable acts. This increases employees’ energy, empowerment, and engagement in their work. Engineering, Education, and Enforcement

Figure 3 depicts six “E” words, those reflecting traditional safety and these representing people-based safety. Engineering is certainly a critical aspect of any safety effort, from designing work equipment and environments that reduce risk of injury to providing the most appropriate personal protection equipment (PPE) for specific tasks. But of course, people need to be educated about the safest practices for particular jobs, including the use of PPE. And if workers do not follow the prescribed protocol for individual and interpersonal safety, the next E-word takes precedence—enforcement.

These three e-words of traditional safety reflect strategies that have dramatically reduced the frequency and severity of personal injuries in the workplace, at home, and on the road. However, many industries have experienced a plateau with regard to their safety performance.

While their overall safety strategies are vastly better than they once were, continuous improvement is elusive. A frantic search for ways to take safety to the next level has not paid off. The paradigm derived from the traditional E-words will not get us there. The three additional E-words depicted in Figure 3 exemplifying PBL, and suggest strategies for addressing the human dynamics of injury prevention and achieving levels of safety excellence beyond current plateaus.

Figure 3: Three New “E” Words for Leading Safety



Empowerment

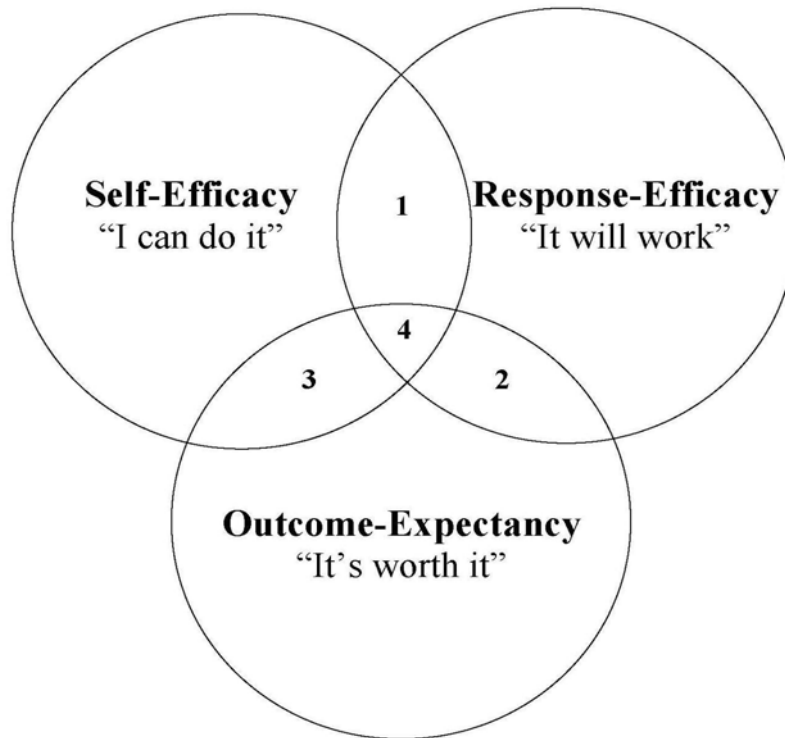
Some applications of the traditional three E-words for safety (especially enforcement) have been detrimental to employee empowerment. For example, many companies translate “enforcement” into a strict punishment approach, and the result has turned off many workers to safety programs. But the word “empowerment” is also a turn-off for many, because it implies giving people more to do with insufficient time and resources.”

“I empower you to take on this additional responsibility,” says the supervisor. The employee thinks, “Great, just what I need, more to do in my busy schedule with the same compensation...Why me?” But this management definition of “empowerment” is not consistent with PBL.

The PBL paradigm incorporates a psychological definition of empowerment: People do not get empowerment from others; they empower themselves. People-based leaders establish conditions and contingencies to facilitate empowerment, but they don’t give people empowerment. They enable the release of empowerment from others. It’s not about “getting empowered,” but rather “feeling empowered.”

Three beliefs are necessary to feel empowered. People-based leaders ask the three questions depicted in Figure 4 to determine whether an individual feels empowered. First, “Can you do it? Do you have the training, time, resources, and personnel support to take on this extra responsibility?” If the leader does not hear a confident “yes,” to these questions, two critical follow-up questions are called for, “What do you need?” and “How can I help?”

Figure 4: The Three Dimensions of Feeling Empowered



1. I can do it and it will work.
2. I’m motivated to make it work.
3. I can and want to do it.
4. I want to make a difference.

Believing you can do something implies self-efficacy (Bandura 1997), but this does not mean you feel empowered. You also need to believe the process will work to achieve a desirable outcome. You need response-efficacy. For example, you can have the skills and self-efficacy to perform interpersonal safety coaching, but you will not actually coach others on a regular basis unless you believe the coaching process can actually improve safety. How does PBL facilitate this belief?

Showing research evidence or statistics is the most common approach to convincing others a particular intervention is effective. But people don’t necessarily relate to these numbers. Usually it’s better to get more personal when attempting to “sell” the value of a safety process to a workforce.

Research on risk perception, for example, has shown that people get more concerned or outraged about an issue when individual cases are referred to in lieu of group statistics (Covello, Sandman, & Slovic 1991; Slovic 1991). Personal testimonies provide a powerful image. Listeners can relate to an individual's personal story and put themselves in the same situation. Two kinds of testimonies can increase response-efficacy: 1) a personal account of an injury that could have been prevented by the safety technique; and 2) an anecdote about someone who avoided injury by using the particular strategy or safety process.

The third empowerment question—"Is it worth it?" Is often the most difficult to answer with a genuine "Yes". For example, a group might believe their safety record is good enough, since they see very few coworkers getting seriously injured. The possible gain from an inconvenient safety process can seem too small to justify the amount of extra time and effort required. Besides most people view the probability of getting hurt to be minuscule; and thus the need to participate in a particular safety effort can seem unimportant.

So how can PBL foster outcome-expectancy—the belief that the possible effect of a safety process is worth the effort? As with building response-efficacy, a case study is more influential than statistics. You could show, for example, the details of a single injury that occurred in your facility, and explain how an intervention like the one being proposed could have prevented that incident. This approach implicates the final two E-words in Figure 3.

Emotion and Empathy

Personal stories evoke emotions, and emotions motivate relevant action. It's not about statistics; it's about people. The most effective motivational speakers for safety are those who portray their personal injuries with genuine emotion. Victims of injury describe in vivid detail the long-term and wide-range negative consequences of their ordeals, from personal pain and inconvenience to the extreme anguish and distress among family and friends. In the words of Charlie Morecraft, one of the most powerful of these motivational speakers, "We make safety personal" (Morecraft & Geller 2006).

Empathy plays a critical role here. The most effective teachers and motivational speakers relate to their audience. They teach their lessons with personal stories relevant to the listeners. And the listeners who are most influenced are those who empathize with the speakers. They see themselves in the same situation and vicariously experience the speaker's pain and suffering. The result: This interpersonal empathy and shared emotions motivate action to prevent a similar event. When the listeners know what to do and believe it will work, they feel empowered.

"A" Words for Leadership

Audacity

At his opening address for the 2006 ASSE PDC, Steve Farber, author of *The Radical Leap* (Farber, 2004), proposed that effective leaders "show a bold and blatant disregard for normal constraints in order to change the world for the better." He poked fun at the common slogan, "Think outside the box," by challenging the assumption there is a "box." The A-word in his LEAP acronym is "audacity."

Mr. Farber did not connect his leadership principles to safety, and this perspective on audacity may have elicited cognitive dissonance among some safety professionals. Safety standards define a “box,” and performing outside the box implies at-risk behavior. However, “audacity” is relevant for safety whenever leaders attempt to go beyond the traditional safety E-words (engineering, education, and enforcement) to increase energy and engagement in safety-related activities.

Thus, in safety there is a “box” of procedures and policies to follow in order to minimize the severity, exposure, and probability of injury. But there is also a “box” of safety procedures for maintaining compliance. This latter box is the one needing audacious, out-of-the-box thinking and acting. In this regard, two other A- words are relevant: avoidance vs. achievement.

Achievement vs. Avoidance

Audacious safety leaders think outside the enforcement box, and design interventions that put a positive, achievement spin on injury prevention. Let’s review briefly the advantages of achievement over avoidance. One of B.F. Skinner’s most important legacies is “selection by consequences” (Skinner 1971), which means behavior is motivated by events or conditions that follow it. People are motivated to achieve pleasant consequences (termed positive reinforcers), and to avoid unpleasant consequences (termed negative reinforcers). Although both types of consequences control behavior effectively, people feel greater personal control and self-accountability when working to *achieve* positive consequences than when working to *avoid* negative consequences (Geller 2005; Skinner 1971).

The dichotomy of working to achieve success versus working to avoid failure is founded on classic research by Richard Atkinson (1964) and David McClelland (1961). As depicted in Figure 5, Atkinson identified four types of individuals: Success seekers, overstrivers, failure avoiders, and failure accepters.

Figure 6: Do you Achieve Success or Avoid Failure?

		Do You Seek Success?	
		No	Yes
Do You Avoid Failure?	No	<i>Failure Acceptor</i>	<i>Success Seeker</i>
	Yes	<i>Failure Avoider</i>	<i>Overstriver</i>

Success seekers are the most desirable participants in a safety-improvement plan. These individuals show the highest levels of self-efficacy, personal control and optimism, and are most likely to actively care for the safety and health of others. With high expectancy for success and low fear of failure, success seekers respond to setbacks with optimistic persistence, self-assurance, and a sense of personal control. They are also most likely to be self-accountable for their safety-related actions.

In contrast, failure avoiders have low expectations for success and thus avoid challenges. They are unsure of themselves, and are overly anxious and pessimistic about the future. They are not self-accountable but are controlled by extrinsic accountability systems. Failure accepters are actually better adjusted than failure avoiders, because their acceptance leads to apathy rather than anxiety. From an organizational perspective, failure accepters are least desirable—they have simply given up.

It's critical to realize these four classifications and perspectives are person *states* and not *traits*. In other words, environmental conditions, work contexts, and company cultures determine the number of success seekers vs. failure avoiders in an organization. People-based leaders increase success seeking over failure avoiding by: 1) asking people what they do for safety, 2) giving priority to proactive process numbers that reflect achievement rather than focusing on reactive injury reports that suggest failure, 3) recognizing individuals and work teams for their safety-related accomplishments, 4) promoting a "safety score card" that holds people accountable for completing process activities related to injury prevention.

Accountability

The above suggestions for encouraging success seeking over failure avoiding imply a change in a critically important A-word—accountability. Whether external to the individual or internal (as in self-accountability), accountability is essential for consistent and long-term action. Unfortunately, the traditional accountability approach to safety is either ineffective or failure-focused, affecting another A-word in adverse ways—attitude. Specifically, the typical injury-rate statistics are negative and not diagnostic. And when workers are held accountable for their safety-related behavior, it's usually about the occurrence of at-risk behavior or the lack of certain safe behavior.

Imagine a "safety score card" that tracks the number of: 1) environmental hazards removed; 2) near-hit reports submitted and reviewed; 3) safety audits completed; 4) interpersonal observation and feedback sessions conducted; 5) safety suggestions received and implemented; and 6) safe vs. at-risk behaviors observed per work team. Such an accountability system puts people in control of an achievement-oriented approach to injury prevention. It would not only increase success seeking for safety, but would also help to change the accountability focus from external and other-directed to internal and self-directed.

Authenticity

This final A-word for PBL requires a clear operational definition in order to guide behavior. The *American Heritage Dictionary* (Houghton Mifflin Company 1991) defines authenticity as "the condition or quality of being authentic, trustworthy, or genuine" (p. 142). And, the first definition of authentic is "conforming to fact and therefore worthy of trust, reliance, or belief" (p.142).

These definitions can incite constructive discussion about the meaning of related words: trust, reliability, consistency, and genuineness with regard to improving organizational safety. More behavioral direction is provided in two books with "authentic" in their titles—*Authentic Leadership* by Bill George (2003), former chairman and CEO of Medtronic, and *Authentic Involvement* by the late Dan Petersen (2001), a safety-leadership guru who made huge beneficial contributions to the safety field throughout his productive 50-year career.

The connection between these books is obvious: Authentic leadership yields authentic involvement. Let's review the primary authenticity directives provided in these books.

Authentic Leaders

Authentic leaders “are more interested in empowering the people they lead to make a difference than they are in power, money or prestige for themselves. They are as guided by qualities of the heart, by passion and compassion, as they are by qualities of the mind” (George, 2003 p. 12).

Authentic leaders are vulnerable and always open to corrective feedback, and they demonstrate self-discipline to continuously improve. Bill George claims you cannot be authentic without compassion. Compassion is developed through profound understanding of other people’s situations and feelings. Empathy is a synonym for compassion, and was discussed above as a critical E-word for PBL.

According to The American Heritage Dictionary (1991), however, compassion is more than understanding and identifying with another person. It also includes “the inclination to give aid or support or to show mercy” (p. 300). Mr. George suggests leaders develop compassion by listening to others’ life stories, by volunteering for community service projects, by having mentoring relationships, and by traveling through developing countries.

People with empathy and compassion lead others with purpose, meaning, and personal values. They don’t put an inordinate focus on short-run profits. They don’t motivate through warnings and threats, thereby de-motivating the development of self-accountability—a key component of authentic involvement.

Authentic Involvement

Authentic involvement is self-directed, and occurs when people are “treated like a mature, adult human being; as an equal, not subordinate, able to use their innate intelligence and skills daily, even hourly; able to achieve; given responsibility; and recognized for doing a good job” (Petersen, 2001 p.46).

So who treats employees like this? You know the answer—authentic leaders. Actually, all of the leadership principles reflected in the LEAD acronym are relevant here. Effective leaders enrich their work culture and help workers become self-directed, self-accountable, and self-motivated. Dr. Petersen advocates an integration of the humanistic and behavioristic approaches to understanding and helping people. This is, in fact, the foundation of People-Based Safety™, referred to as “humanistic behaviorism” (Geller 2005).

Problem-solving training. Petersen advocates shared decision making between salary and hourly workers, with each side recognizing the need for interdependent cooperation. For this to happen, managers, supervisors, and hourly workers need training on how to interact effectively throughout a systematic process of balanced problem-solving and decision-making. Petersen suggests training on specific analysis techniques, such as statistical process control (SPC) which includes the use of fishbone diagrams, pareto charts, flowcharts, control charts, and scatter diagrams.

Bottom line: Balanced and shared decision-making among managers and hourly workers requires mutual training on effective problem-solving tools and methods.

Problem-solving mechanisms. Dr. Petersen also discusses a variety of practical ways to enable regular employee input on safety-related matters, thereby facilitating authentic involvement. The following techniques are described in more detail in Petersen’s book:

1. Safety Improvement Teams—Management asks employees to address a specific safety issue.
2. Job Safety Analysis—Work groups define specific environmental and/or behavioral hazards associated with each step of a job and develop ways to eliminate or control them.

3. Hazard Hunt—Employees use a special form on which to report anything they feel is a hazard, followed by corrective-action feedback from management.
4. Ergonomic Analysis—After training on ergonomic principles, workers observe the various behaviors of a job and consider ways to decrease the probability of a cumulative trauma disorder.
5. Incident Recall Technique—Through one-on-one interviews, employees relate a specific close call they experienced or heard about, suggest contributing factors to the incident, and then explore ways to prevent similar incidents and potential injuries.

The observation and feedback process of behavior-based safety (BBS) should be added to this list, including employees' development, application and refinement of a critical behavior checklist (CBC). Workers use this CBC to coach each other, which includes observing safe vs. at-risk behaviors on the job, defining barriers to safe behavior and facilitators of at-risk behavior, and providing constructive behavioral feedback to the worker. This process, as detailed in a number of BBS books (e.g., Geller 1999, 2001; Krause, Hidley, & Hodson 1996; McSween 2003), sets the stage for authentic involvement. But of course, the quantity and quality of actual employee involvement are dependent on management support and PBL.

“D” for Data

The “D” of the LEAD acronym stands for one word—data. Data provide both direction and motivation for behavior. By observing the results of our actions, we learn how well we completed a task and what we can do to improve.

But some data are useless, misleading, and de-motivating. Sometimes we consider data from a faulty or insufficient measurement system, resulting in deficient diagnostics. For example, injury statistics based on self-report are unreliable and have no diagnostic value. And they can activate distress or a false sense of security. Leaders need to use data strategically to provide appropriate direction and motivation for themselves and others.

Accountability Data

“What gets measured gets done”. This popular slogan reflects the connection between data and accountability. But using wrong data to assess accountability can be disastrous. “What could be worse” said the leadership guru—Dr. Edwards Deming, “holding willing workers accountable for numbers they cannot control” (Deming 1991).

Behavior vs. performance. Dr. Deming taught us the critical difference between behavior and performance, a distinction needed to select and examine the right data. Many behavioral researchers and safety professionals use these words interchangeably, but my online dictionary (www.m-w.com) defines performance as “something accomplished” and behavior as “the manner of conducting oneself.”

In other words, behavior contributes to a process, whereas performance reflects the results of a process. Behavior-based feedback reveals data that inhibits, facilitates, or improves a process, whereas performance feedback occurs when productivity or injury data of an organization are reviewed. Such outcome data are certainly influenced by behavior, but many other factors could be implicated—from environmental conditions to attitudes of the people involved.

Feedback data. The behavior/performance distinction is critical for giving the right kind of feedback. Specifically, when can people hold others accountable for data? The answer is simple. Hold people accountable for data they directly influence.

In safety, for example, it's fair to hold people accountable for the variety of activities they can do to prevent personal injuries—from coaching others regarding their safe vs. at-risk behaviors to completing hazard recognition and near-hit reports. Likewise, if an individual's behavior or lack thereof is clearly linked to an injury, it is legitimate to hold that person accountable (in part) for the performance data reflected by injury statistics. However, the contribution of factors beyond the individual's control should be acknowledged.

Some performance deficits result from behavior deviating from the process. But performance deficits also occur from system factors independent of process-related behavior. Hold people accountable for the first, but not the latter.

Isn't this common sense? Then why does there seem to be so much emphasis on injury statistics or performance data at safety meetings? How often is a graph of safety-related behavior displayed to illustrate accomplishment (or failure) at injury prevention? Bottom line: Show process data to individuals and groups that reflect their controllable actions associated directly with performance data.

Leadership Data

Almost every book on leadership presents information on the person characteristics of leaders. For example, the recent text by Thomas Krause (2005), *Leading with Safety* connects leadership with five personality traits—emotional resilience, extraversion, learning orientation, collegiality, and conscientiousness. Dr. Krause also distinguishes between transactional leaders (or managers) and transformational leaders with certain interpersonal styles (including challenging, engaging, inspiring, and influential). And in *The Psychology of Safety Handbook*, Geller (2001) described leaders as individuals who are energetic, passionate, open, trustworthy, compassionate, goal-directed, self-confident, intelligent, and flexible.

Applying person data. It's fascinating and entertaining to explore one's personality, and consider correlations between specific person factors and behavior. Many readers, for example, have taken the Myers-Briggs or an analogous personality inventory, and enjoyed learning about the behavioral implications of certain person qualities and styles. Indeed, we sit on the edge of our seats when a trainer displays data related to our own personality or job assignment.

However, the author urges caution when considering these data. First, the assessment tools for personality data are often unreliable and invalid (see Geller 2005, Chapter 18). Secondly, the connection between most person data and behavior is ambiguous or weak. But, the critical issue is applicability.

How can data suggesting leadership-related personality traits, states, or styles be used? Can such data provide directional or motivational feedback? Actually, using these data to influence people is analogous to developing an action plan from an organization's injury data. In both cases, the data are unreliable and influenced by undefined factors independent of people's behavior. And neither provides useful diagnostic information to direct continuous improvement.

Practical leadership data. Krause (2005) does acknowledge low practical value in assessing the leadership-related characteristics of people. For example, telling people they score high or low on a measure of charisma gives minimal direction for improving leadership. However, to the extent it's possible to define a particular leadership quality in terms of specific behaviors, personality data can be useful. For example, by observing people judged to be charismatic, it might be possible to identify behaviors that reflect this label and then tell people what they can do to demonstrate charisma. Subsequently, a person can be observed and given behavior-based feedback related to the presence or absence of charisma-related behaviors.

Aubrey and Jamie Daniels advance an entirely different perspective in their book, *Measure of a Leader* (Daniels & Daniels 2005). They claim the measure of a leader should focus on the behavior of the followers. In other words, leadership should be defined by follower

behavior rather than leader behavior. The key type of follower behavior to look for is “discretionary behavior” supporting the leader’s vision.

What is discretionary behavior? This is behavior that exceeds a worker’s job requirements. It is self-directed, meaningful, and intrinsically reinforcing. I refer to this type of behavior as “actively caring” whenever it relates to injury prevention or health promotion (e.g. Geller 1996, 2001, 2005).

Increasing Discretionary Behavior

The Daniels brothers focus on the appropriate use of “positive reinforcement” to increase discretionary behavior. With threats and punitive consequences, people do not become self-accountable. They do only what’s required. Effective leaders reward behaviors consistent with their vision and thereby motivate the successive occurrences of relevant discretionary behavior.

Approaches advocated for increasing actively-caring behavior are consistent with these suggestions (e.g., Geller 1994, 1996, 2001, 2002, 2005). Briefly, research indicates people are more likely to help others (or emit discretionary behavior) when they have relatively high levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, personal control, optimism, and a sense of belongingness. So anything a leader does to increase these person states will increase the likelihood of discretionary behavior.

Genuine behavior-based rewards and recognition are likely to enhance self-esteem, self-efficacy, personal control, and optimism, and in some cases even belongingness. But as reviewed in Geller (2001, 2005), there are other ways to facilitate the occurrence of these person states and thereby increase the probability of discretionary behavior.

A Final Word About Data

Any discussion of the collection and application of data will necessarily be narrow and incomplete. In fact, entire university courses focus on data acquisition, analysis, and interpretation. This presentation barely cracks the surface of this important topic.

The critical connection between data and accountability was discussed, as well as the need to discriminate between process-relevant behavioral data and outcome-relevant performance data. Also highlighted was the common use of person data to define leadership versus a more practical behavior-based approach to measure one’s leadership competence.

One final point: Please be skeptical of people’s opinions, even if they sound like good common sense. The author recommends frequent use of the slogan “Got data?” And, when someone shows you data, ask another question, “How can these data be used to facilitate continuous improvement?”

In Summary

The terms “management” and “leadership” are used interchangeably, but these words reflect different job assignments and responsibilities. Both are necessary to achieve the quantity and quality of engagement needed to achieve and maintain an injury-free workplace. Simply put, managers hold people accountable for doing something, whereas people-based leaders inspire people to *want* to do something. In other words, managers provoke other-directed involvement, while people-based leaders influence self-persuasion and self-directed engagement.

Although it’s usually more desirable for people to be self-directed than other-directed, much behavior is other-directed. We all do certain things because of an external accountability system. Managers are in charge of these systems; that’s part of their job description. They are held accountable for monitoring a performance evaluation system that holds other people accountable for accomplishing specific goals or reaching certain milestones.

Safety management is necessary at times to hold people accountable for doing the right things for injury prevention. However, management alone is not sufficient to achieve and sustain an injury-free workplace. People-based leadership (PBL) is needed to build the kind of culture that inspires responsibility or personal accountability for safety. This paper reviewed essential qualities for effective PBL as well as strategies for developing these qualities throughout a work culture.

These PBL qualities were organized around the acronym LEAD—each letter reflecting key aspects of PBL. For example, people-based leaders listen with empathy before offering advice or direction, and they aim to enable feelings of empowerment. They assess whether people feel empowered by asking three questions: 1) “Do you believe you can do it?” 2) “Do you believe it will work?” and 3) “Do you believe it’s worth the effort?”

Whenever the answers to these empowerment questions are not “yes,” the people-based leader asks a key “actively-caring” question, “How can I help?” People-based leaders take the time and provide the support needed to solicit a “yes” answer to these questions. Why? Because when people feel empowered, they also feel ownership for the process and go beyond the call of duty to make the process work. They become self-accountable.

Accountability is a key A-word for PBL. External accountability systems are needed to manage and maintain desirable behavior. But since people are not monitored constantly nor are always motivated by extrinsic contingencies, self-directed accountability is needed. The PBL principles reviewed in this paper can build self-accountability in a workforce if they are practiced regularly and with authenticity—another critical A-word for PBL.

The critically important D-word is “data”. Without data, progress is impossible. People cannot improve without specific feedback about their process-relevant behavior, and such feedback requires appropriate behavior-based data. Moreover, people’s motivation often comes from observations of their accomplishments from the process—outcome-based data.

The PBL principles and procedures discussed here are evidence-based. What does this mean? It means objective and reliable data were obtained from systematic observations of people’s behaviors occurring under conditions reflecting an operational definition of a particular PBL principle. Such data enabled the PBL advice given here.

Extensions and refinements of these recommendations for PBL require more data. Data are essential for continuous improvement. The author hopes this paper will activate intervention, observations, and evaluation in order to learn from the resultant data and thereby enrich PBL.

References

- The American Heritage Dictionary* (1991). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Atkinson, J. W. *An introduction to motivation*. Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, 1964.
- Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Covello, V.T., Sandman, P.M., & Slovic, P. (1991). Guidelines for communicating information about chemical risks effectively and responsibly. In D.G. Mayo & R.D. Hollander (Eds). *Acceptable evidence: Science and values in risk management*. (pp. 66-90). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Covey, S.R. (1989). *The seven habits of highly effective people*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Daniels, A. C., & Daniels, J. E. (2005). *Measure of a leader: An actionable formula for legendary leadership*. Atlanta, GA: Performance Management Publications.
- Deming, W.E. (1991, May) *Quality, productivity and competitive position*. Workshop presented by Quality Enhancement Seminars, Inc., Cincinnati, OH.

- Geller, E. S. (1994). Ten principles for achieving a Total Safety Culture. *Professional Safety*, 39(9), 18-24.
- Geller, E. S. (1996). *The psychology of safety: How to improve behaviors and attitudes on the job*. Radnor, PA: Chilton Book Company.
- Geller, E.S. (1998). *Practical behavior-based safety: Step-by-step methods to improve your workplace*. Neenah, WI: J.J. Keller & Associates, Inc.
- Geller, E.S. (1999). Sustaining participation in a safety improvement process: Ten relevant principles from behavioral science. *Professional Safety*, 44, 9, 24-29.
- Geller, E. S. (2001). *The psychology of safety handbook*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Geller, E. S. (2002). *The participation factor: How to increase involvement in occupational safety*. Des Plaines, IL: American Society of Safety Engineers.
- Geller, E. S. (2005). *People-based safety: The source*. Virginia Beach, VA: Coastal Training and Technologies Corporation.
- Geller, E. S. (2006). From good to great in safety: What does it take to be world class? *Professional Safety*, 51 (6), 35-40.
- Geller, E.S., & Lehman, P.K. (Eds.) (2007). *Teaching excellence at a research-centered university: Energy, empathy, and engagement in the classroom*. Boston, MA: Pearson Custom Publishing.
- George, W. (2003). *Authentic leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Krause, T.R. (2005). *Leading with safety*. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Krause, T. R., Hidley, J. H., & Hodson, S. J. (1996). *The behavior-based safety process: Managing improvement for an injury-free culture* (Second Edition), New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- McSween, T. E. (2003). *The values-based safety process: Improving your safety culture with a behavioral approach* (Second Edition), New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- McClelland, D.C. (1961). *The achieving society*. Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand.
- Morecraft, C., & Geller, E.S. (2006). *The human side of injury prevention*. Motivational keynote for the Annual Congress and Expo of the National Safety Council, November, San Diego, CA.
- Petersen, D. (2001). *Authentic Involvement*. Chicago, IL: The National Safety Council.
- Skinner, B. F. (1971). *Beyond freedom and dignity*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Slovic, P. (1991). Beyond numbers: A broader perspective on risk perception and risk communication. In D. G. Mayo & R. D. Hollander (Eds.). *Deceptable evidence: Science and values in risk management* (pp.48-65), New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Sulzer-Azaroff, B., & Austin, J. (2000). Does BBS work? Behavior-based safety and injury reduction: A survey of the evidence. *Professional Safety*, 45(7), 19-24.