

Winning the Hearts and Minds in a Foreign Culture for SHE Success

**Capt. Norman H. Black, CSP
Area ES&H Manager
International Bechtel Company Ltd.
Abu Dhabi, UAE**

Introduction

The concept of Abraham Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* and the power this theory has for motivating people is basic to most western-trained SHE professionals. Imagine a workplace where Maslow's theory is turned upside down. In many third-world nations, the traditional western concept of human needs is not as effective in reaching the "hearts and minds" of the workforce because a person's "needs triangle" is inverted as compared to what is understood in western culture. The labor force in many of these countries has strong personal and religious beliefs which take precedent above all other things, including the value of life itself. This session will present an approach used on a mega-construction project in the Middle East where the hearts and minds of the non-western worker were won over for the sake of safety.

The Concept of an Alternative Hierarchy

What possesses a fully functioning human being from becoming so distracted in life as to minimize in their own mind the potential for grievous bodily injury which may occur in their immediate vicinity? Why would a perfectly capable person suddenly depart from a logical train of thought which would result in causing themselves injury?

These questions were asked repeatedly by the accident investigation teams on a mega-construction project in the Middle East following four unrelated industrial accidents which resulted in death to the client contractor employees involved as well as an escalating recordable injury rate. Although the incidents were not necessarily unique in the annals of general construction, the initiatives needed to prevent reoccurrence required a hard look at the values and the hierarchy of needs of the workers exposed to the related risks. Shown in Table 1 are four of the most serious incidents which occurred in 2009.

DATE	DESCRIPTION	RESULT
May 2009	Dump Truck Backs Over Banks-man	Fatality (1)
July 2009	Operator Run Over by a Dozer	Fatality (1)
August 2009	Water Truck Collision with Dump Truck	Fatality (1)
August 2009	Near Head-on Collision of Dump Trucks	Fatality (2)

Table 1. These are the most serious incidents which initiated the examination of the hierarchy of needs for all workers exposed to the risks.

Human factors engineering is a key element of successful operational safety. It is the study of human capabilities and actions in complex working environments such as, but not limited to, aviation, nuclear power, healthcare, and construction. In analyzing the contributing causes of the incidents listed above, a number of human factors were identified. In addition, other probable environmental and operational factors had been identified based on the available evidence. These include:

- Temperature extremes and their impact on equipment operations and human performance
- Work scheduling procedures
- Behavioral affects resulting from religious and cultural beliefs and practices
- Safety training methods and procedures

The key concepts of human factors were considered as the four incidents were examined, as well as the balance of the construction-related safety incidents which had occurred in 2009. Using a cause-and-effect analysis of all site-wide incidents, a step incident investigation process was followed which included a collaborative root cause investigation of the incidents, development of short- and long-term corrective actions, securing project and corporate resources to assure implementation of corrective actions, implementation of the plans, validating that in fact the actions would provide for a “non-repeat” situation of the incidents, and lastly, but perhaps most important, sharing the lessons learned with peers and similar projects. To forge a new path in affecting the actions of people, first the people affected need to be understood.

At birth, humans possess little sense of want other than the need for nutrition and comfort. Yet as Abraham Maslow professed as a humanistic psychologist, human behavior is not the result of mechanical forces or stimuli; instead behavior is created over time by potentials. With humans always seeking a loftier level of capability, they have the potential of ultimately resulting in a “fully functioning person.”

Implementing the Initiative

By focusing on the essential elements of people, material, equipment, and procedures, corrective initiatives were part of the action plan with elements including what are considered “typical” in a

sophisticated safety culture. Actions related to stopping further vehicle and heavy equipment accidents immediately included: reduction of the posted speed limits, mandatory mid-day breaks, installation of speed governors on plant equipment, additional pre-start briefings for all of the client-contractor employees, further training for new-to-site workers, etc.

During the course of these early corrective-action discussions aimed at assuring the incidents would never reoccur, several suggestions for a less-than sophisticated workforce were introduced. Yet this elementary approach was quickly discounted as stereotyping the workers. Contractor management personnel capitalized on the fact that the workers, primarily from developing countries, were found to be more creative with the use of the available resources and more watchful of job hazards as compared to their western counterparts. Many workers, however, were also found to follow orders given to them by their supervisors, despite the hazard of the assigned tasks.

With the need identified to cross cultural differences to more fully engage the workforce, the concept of understanding the basis for a worker's actions became a central element of the corrective action process. It was determined that this basis was the result of a combination of their work experience and, to a degree, their childhood. A world-class project required a world-class approach to getting all of the client-contractor employees involved in the safety solution. Inclusion and participation of all workers in the desired safety culture would be at the root of modifying the human factor to such a degree that one could not conceive of performing a dangerous task unless it could be performed without being injured. As a result of humans responding to the consequence of injury, the consequence becomes clearly understood, and preventative actions to drive ever-improving safety performance can then be implemented.

As discussed previously, various safety initiatives were employed to further instill the strong safety culture on the project. However, because of the extreme influence of religion in the lives of this particular workforce, an entirely new approach was considered. Specifically, the consideration of faith-based influence on the behaviors workers was included in the corrective action plan. It was recognized that most of the labor force of 8,000+ workers originated from parts of the world that were devout Muslim, among other religions. The majority of the workforce that were practicing Muslims actively participated in five daily prayers. They also attended Friday prayers at their local mosque which was led by a learned person titled an Imam or religious person. Thereby the idea of requesting the Imam's assistance with delivering a weekly safety theme was first conceived. But before the concept could be broached with the local Imams, a clearer understanding of Islam was required.

With the assistance of project personnel who were schooled in the teachings of the Qur'an, a few basic tenants were realized. The Arabic word which gives Islamic religion its name is *islam*, which means "submission," in particular, submission to God. This submission takes the form of the *arkan ad-din*, or the Five Pillars of Religion, which form the active ritualistic life of the Muslim and define the believer's relationship to God. The Five Pillars of Islam are considered obligatory for all Muslims. The Qur'an presents them as a framework for worship and a sign of commitment to the faith. The Five Pillars consist of five ritual duties, as follows:

- Faith in God
- Daily prayers
- Care of the needy
- Fasting
- Pilgrimage

While considering how the basic teachings of Islam promoted identifiable behaviors and how those behaviors could be better understood in order to further develop a positive safety culture, there were precepts that kept reappearing that had to be borne in mind in consideration of seeking the Imam's assistance. This included the belief by many of the workers that most occurrences could be explained as God's will or *insha'Allah*. It also became quickly apparent that the majority of the project Muslims had strong family ties, stronger than what is typically witnessed in western cultures by the majority of the workforce.

Group meetings were held with workers to further understand the structural belief they demonstrated as practicing Muslims. The responses routinely focused on their spirituality, followed by their support of family and friends, with individual self-being or personal safety and security the least important in their daily life. The revelation that individuals will place "self" last on this list was an epiphany. What was believed to be paramount in many western-based safety management systems was now being relegated to fourth place in the hierarchy of needs, that being "self". It is important to understand that group meetings with the contractor's employees served as a means to not only understand how to effectively communicate safety expectations and goals to the workers, but to understand those elements in their private life which were of most importance.

From the meetings with the workers, the strategy was developed whereby a dialogue could be initiated and continued with the Imams. Knowing the Imams are looked upon by each group (or "congregation" in a western terminology) as spiritual advisors, it was determined that a positive relationship was required with the Imam before the effort to deliver safety messages during the weekly prayers would be successful. To this end, it was decided to enlist the contractor's safety specialists, who were all practicing Muslims. They would be the authors of a weekly printed safety message used by the Imams at their Friday prayers.

Fortunately the Imams embraced the entire safety concept and the new initiative. The engagement of the Imams has proven beneficial to affect a positive culture in the workforce, as shown by the falling incident rates since implementation of the concept. By communicating safety in a method that the workers understand and respect, a step-change in the safety culture has been achieved.

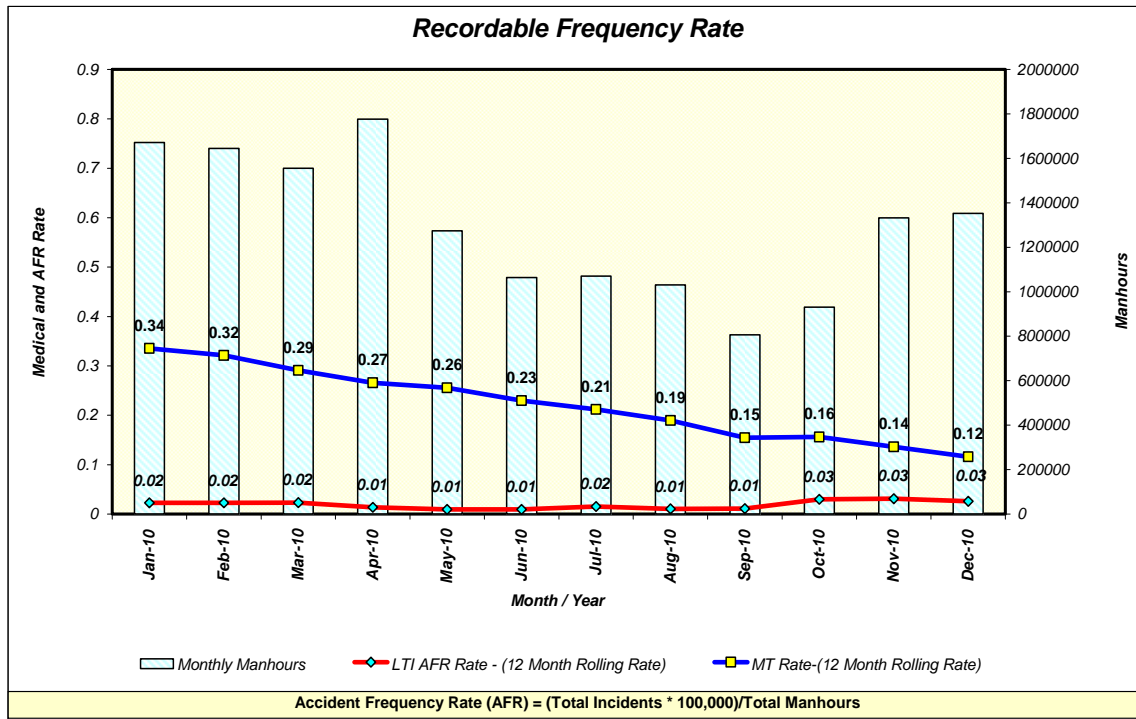


Table 2. The falling accident rate over time demonstrates the effectiveness of the various initiatives including safety messages delivered by the Imams.

An example of a message delivered by an Imam to a group of vehicle drivers is as follows (translated from Urdu):

My dear brothers and friends:

In this verse and many other occasions ALLAH KAREEM tells us about patience. If we keep patience we can stop many troubles coming to us or towards our family and colleagues. For example - Last week we had one tailgating incident. If drivers maintain patience and keep proper following distance, this incident would not have occurred. Similar to why we should follow the project safety rules for not exceeding vehicle speed limits, do not tailgate, keeping a safe distance, not using mobile telephone whilst driving and do not overtake, so we can keep our site free from accidents. It is only possible when we keep our patience. Finally I say it once more with respect; I will follow the Project safety rules. Allah helps us to keep our site safe and free from any kind of accident.

As a result of the success contributed largely by the initiative of the Imams incorporating a safety message into the weekly prayers, attending workers became actively engaged in the creation of a dynamic site safety culture. They now believe that protecting one’s self is aligned with the teachings of the Qur’an and in turn supports the Five Pillars of Islam. The message of this initiative and the success which was generated was captured in a short video that was cascaded to similar projects in order for this concept to be understood and possibly used elsewhere.

In Summary

The concept of recognizing the differences in the values people practice and in some cases exhibit is fundamental in modern safety leadership. The better a safety practitioner becomes at

understanding the values their workforce holds true, the better the safety practitioner becomes at preventing an accident before it happens by creating a safety culture based on the beliefs of the workers.

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