

ALL ABOARD – Safety Professionals Unite!

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Over the years the role of safety and in particular the role of the safety professional has been characterized by its lack of inclusion in the organizational fabric of many institutions. This has been the case in spite of the fact that no other profession can claim, as safety does, that safety professionals save lives and their sphere of influence touches every aspect of organizational and human existence. So why then has the safety professional and their contribution been so widely marginalized and why is it that even to this day, safety professionals are not fully recognized for their contributions?

In response to these queries, many people may want to turn their gaze to factors outside of the safety profession such as individuals involved in line management and other areas that have more direct control over operations. However, I would like to take a different track and it is one that emphasizes not what we expect others to do for us but what we can do for ourselves that will help others recognize us in the way that we need to be recognized. Notice that I said need to be recognized versus want to be recognized because a need is something that is essential versus a want, which is something that is merely desirable.

The fact of the matter is that as safety professionals we have been all too happy to allow others to define who we are and as a result, I believe that we have forgotten just how valuable our role is and how much we need to celebrate what we contribute so that it keeps us fresh in our perspectives and the way we pursue our professional aspirations within the environments that we serve.

In this regard when I say, 'ALL ABOARD – Safety Professionals Unite!'; it is a recognition of the fact that within our profession we need to become better at sharing and celebrating our successes and the impact that we have on the entities and people we serve. This recognition and sharing needs to take place not just in our local places of employment but we need to get better at sharing across industries.

This will allow us to become better advocates on a broader scale for our brothers and sisters who toil unceasingly in myriad difficult situations too vast to name. Now mind you this sharing process needs to come from a critical rethink of how we conduct ourselves on a local level and this process, which can and must lead to the sharing I have just mentioned is what I would like to share with you know.

The first thing that we need to understand is that safety or the perception of safety in our organizations has to be moved from a priority to a value. This is due to the fact that priorities change more often than we would like to admit but a value is something that has consistency and universality as part of its very make-up. The process of undergoing this shift will not be easy because it represents not just change but significant change and that is a process fraught with peril.

The reason this is the case is due to the fact that while many people recognize what safety does contribute and how much more we can contribute to effective organizational functioning they chose not to ask us the question because they already know the answer and it is something they do not want to face. With this in mind, we cannot be afraid to take the truth to power and raise issues that we know others do not want to raise. We have to understand the unspoken and be willing to engage in the question(s) beyond the obvious ones that will create 'constructive disharmony' that will allow our organizations to heal themselves from within with safety as the primary driver of that change.

Now some may be asking but why should safety be willing to put itself on the front line in this effort? My response is that in order for us to contribute in a way that we have not

in the past, we must do something we have never done before. Or as Booker T. Washington once said, “We must find a common way to do an uncommon thing.” Safety professionals need to be ALL ABOARD and on one accord so that there is universality of effort that can be clearly seen by all if we are to transcend our current roles.

There is a price to pay for not being and doing what we know we can just as there is a price to pay for not changing. If we stay the same, we loose and given our current standing (which is slowly changing) in many organizations we cannot afford to stay the same.

The only constant in our world is change, which from a process standpoint is akin to the five stages of death and dying. The change process includes; denial, anger, questioning, acceptance and peace. We cannot get to the peace stage without stage without understanding our role in asking the questions that will allow all organizational participants to seek new ways of addressing familiar issues.

In order to move forward we need to be ALL ABOARD and our ability to build and secure our integrity and credibility must be unmatched. There are 2 primary questions that we must ask ourselves which are: Who am I and what do I stand for? These two questions can apply equally to individuals and to the profession as a whole because there should be transferability and transparency between what people see in my actions as an individual and what they see in this profession.

So where does this lead us in our journey to identify a more holistic manner in which to have people to view us and our role? It leads to recognition that if we are to elevate our status we will need to assist members of our organization in understanding the change process by allowing them to better understand what we are willing to do to make change possible. We need to better focus and be more disciplined in looking at processes and human performance (because people matter – they always shave and they always will) versus human error. The blame game is not something that we can engage in with our colleagues rather we must be willing to show them and share with them in more tangible

ways why our inclusion in a systems approach will benefit everyone. We need to become better in tune to the music of our organization and if we want to change that we need to do so with concrete evidence of where the theory and reality of the case do not match. Finally we need to take a step back and be willing to share responsibility and solicit input that will serve to demystify our role.

What I have just described is not an easy prescription. However, it is a necessary one that if followed and adhered to will pay dividends for a long time. **ALL ABOARD – Safety Professionals Unite!** There is no better time than now when the winds of change are blowing directly in our favor. Let's raise our sails and adjust them accordingly to take advantage of this opportunity.