

## **People-Powered Safety: Paradigm Shifts for an Actively Caring Work Culture**

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Interventions to address the human dynamics of injury prevention have improved dramatically since the early 1900s. The first systematic application of psychological science to industrial safety focused on finding the psychological causes of personal injuries. It assumed people were responsible for most close calls and injuries, usually through mental errors caused by anxiety, attitude, fear, stress, personality, or emotional state.<sup>1</sup> Injury reduction was typically attempted by “readjusting” attitude or personality, usually through supervisor counseling or discipline<sup>2</sup>

This so-called “psychological approach” held that certain individuals were “accident prone.” By removing these workers from risky jobs or by disciplining them to correct their attitude or personality problems, it was thought workplace injuries could be reduced. But this focus on "accident-proneness" was not effective, partly because reliable and valid measurement procedures were not available. Also, the personality factors contributing to "accident proneness" are not probably consistent characteristics or traits within people, but vary from time to time and situation to situation.

### **Engineering First**

Enthusiasm for the early “psychological approach” waned because of difficulty of measuring its impact.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the seminal research and scholarship of William Haddon suggested engineering changes held the most promise for large-scale, long-term reductions in injury severity.<sup>4</sup>

As the first administrator of the National Highway Safety Bureau (now the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration), Dr. Haddon was able to turn his theory and research into the first federal automobile safety standards. Haddon believed injury is caused by delivering excess energy to the body, and injury prevention depends on controlling that energy. The prevention focus now shifted to engineering and epidemiology, and resulted in developing personal protective equipment (PPE) for work and recreational environments, as well as standards and policy regarding the use of PPE. Haddon's basic theory eventually led to collapsible steering wheels, padded dashboards, head restraints, and air-bags in automobiles.

### **The Three E-Words**

This brief history of the safety movement in the U.S. explains why engineering is the dominant paradigm in industrial health and safety<sup>5</sup>, with secondary emphasis on two additional “E’s”-- education and enforcement. Over the past several decades, the basic protocol for reducing workplace injury has been to:

- 1) Design the safest equipment, environmental settings, or protective devices,
- 2) *Educate* people regarding the use of the *engineering* interventions, and
- 3) Use discipline to *enforce* compliance with recommended safe work practices.

Thanks to this paradigm, most safety professionals are safety *engineers*, who commonly advocate that “Safety is a condition of employment.”

The three E’s have dramatically reduced injury severity in the workplace, at home, and on the road. Take motor vehicle safety, for example. The Government Accounting Office has estimated conservatively the early automobile safety standards ushered through Congress by Dr. Haddon had saved at least 28,000 American lives by 1974<sup>6</sup>. In addition, the state laws passed in the 1980s requiring use of vehicle safety belts and child safety seats have saved countless more lives. Many *more* lives would be saved and injuries avoided if more people buckled up and used child safety seats for their children.

The current rate of safety belt use in the U.S. is about 84 percent,<sup>7</sup> a dramatic improvement from the 15 percent prior to statewide interventions, including belt-use laws, campaigns to educate people about the value of safety-belt use, and large-scale enforcement blitzes by local and state police officers.

There is still much room for improvement, especially considering most of the riskiest drivers still don’t buckle up.<sup>8</sup> Over the past several years, the U.S. Department of Transportation has set nationwide belt-use goals of 90 percent, but to date this goal has not been met--at least over the long term. It seems the effectiveness of current methods to increase the use of this particular type of PPE has plateaued or asymptoted well below 90 percent, and is below 80 percent in several states.

Turning our attention to industry, many corporate safety professionals have claimed their plant’s safety performance has reached a plateau. Yes, their overall safety record is vastly better than it once was. But continuous improvement is elusive. A frantic search for ways to take safety to the next level has not paid off. The old “three E’s” paradigm will not get us there. A certain percentage of people keep falling through the cracks. Keep on doing what you’re doing and you’ll keep on getting what you’re getting. As the author heard Dr. Edwards Deming say many times, “Goals without method, what could be worse?”<sup>9</sup>

### Three New E-Words

The author advocates the addition of three new E’s--empowerment, empathy, and emotion. Of course, tradition should not be abandoned. We need to maintain a focus on engineering, education, and enforcement strategies. But to get beyond current plateaus and reach an injury-free work culture, we must attend more competently to the human dynamics of injury prevention. These three new E-words suggest specific directions or principles.

## Empowerment

Some operational definitions of the three traditional E's for safety (especially *enforcement*) have been detrimental to employee empowerment. Many supervisors have translated "enforcement" into a strict punishment approach, and the result has turned off many employees to safety programs. These workers may do what is required, but no more. Some individuals who feel especially controlled by safety regulations might even try to beat the system by working at-risk when no one's watching. Such contrary behavior in a top-down enforcement context brings the individual a sense of gratification or freedom. This is predictable from theory and research in the area of psychological reactance,<sup>10</sup> and is demonstrated in the illustration below.



For you to feel empowered, which is feeling commitment, ownership, and self-motivated, you need to answer "yes" to the following questions: 1) Can you do it? 2) Will it work?; and 3) Is it worth it?

The first two questions are relatively easy to address. A "yes" answer to Question 1 means you have the proper training, resources, and opportunity to accomplish the assignment. Management can usually enable these needs to justify a "yes" to this question.

The second question is an education question. Have you received the rationale, perhaps including evidence-based data, to believe the process will work to bring your team or organization closer to a shared vision? In safety terms, will the method (e.g., a certain behavior-based coaching process, a close-call reporting procedure, a new hazard-recognition and removal directive) bring us closer to our vision of injury-free?

While a "yes" answer to the first two questions can usually be accomplished through interpersonal conversation and manipulations of environmental conditions, a "yes" answer to the third question can be difficult to obtain. A "yes" to "Is it worth it?" means you believe all the extra time, effort, and inconvenience needed to comply with all safety regulations and procedures are worth the effort.

Many of us take risks daily, including talking on a cell-phone while driving over the speed limit, and we fortunately avoid injury. Indeed, we are rewarded for our risk taking with convenience, time-saving comfort, and even tacit approval from observers who don't object to our at-risk behavior.

Safety leaders attempt to convince people that the extras for injury prevention are worth the effort by showing group statistics of injury rates, perhaps evidencing a reduction in TRIR as a function of a particular safety program. However, the average person is not persuaded because it's easy to say to oneself, "It won't happen to me." Statistics are just not personal enough. The next new E-word is now relevant.

### Emotion

This second new E-word for safety reflects the need to make safety personal. A focus on the traditional E's (Engineering, Education, & Enforcement) and outcome numbers, as in lost-time injuries and Total Recordable Injury rate, can take people's thinking and feeling away from the emotional aspects of personal injury and the most meaningful rationale for the extra effort exerted to keep people safe. In other words, it's critical to emphasize the personal purpose behind hazard recognition, corrective action following a close call, the avoidance of shortcuts, and behavior-based safety coaching. This is the emotional side of safety, and it can feed self-motivation to participate in injury-prevention programs.

Motivational speeches from individuals seriously injured on the job (e.g., Charlie Morecraft, Brad Gardner, and Tony Crow) activate the emotions of their audiences, leading to increased self-motivation to go beyond the call of duty to keep themselves and coworkers safe (i.e., to actively care). Listeners visualize themselves in the situation detailed by a previously-injured worker, and they experience vicariously the horrific negative consequences vividly described. The resultant emotions can activate a personal need to follow workplace directives related to occupational safety.

### Empathy

Empathy is a critical E-word in the human dynamics of injury prevention. Whether the topic is empathic listening, empathic leadership, or empathic performance appraisals and corrective action, the focus is on the other person's feelings, needs, or perceptions. Starting with this viewpoint makes every other management strategy more effective. It's more than the Golden Rule: "Treat others as you would like to be treated." It's the Platinum Rule: "Treat others as they want to be treated."

Empathy is not the same as sympathy. Don't confuse the two, though the dictionary definitions are similar. *The New Merriam Webster Dictionary* (1989) defines sympathy as "the capacity for entering into and sharing the feelings or interests of another"; and empathy as "the capacity for experiencing as one's own the feelings of another".

The *American Heritage Dictionary* (1991) defines empathy as "identification with and understanding of another's situation, feeling, and motives" — in contrast to sympathy as "a feeling or expression of pity or sorrow for the distress of another person".

We sympathize when we express concern or understanding for another individual's situation, but we empathize when we identify with another person's situation and realize what it's like to be in the other person's shoes.

## The Empathic Coach

Empathic Coaching reflects the highest level of interpersonal conversation and it can do wonders to facilitate mutual learning and behavioral improvement. Leaders who demonstrate empathy — sincere understanding and appreciation for other people's circumstances — are more likely to be followed. And their directives, based on an empathic diagnosis of the situation, are more effective.

Conversations at this level are not efficient, but they are effective. They require patience. It takes time to learn, mostly through questioning and listening, what it's like to be in the other person's situation. Then the objective shifts to designing an action plan that fits the circumstances. This requires mutual understanding, but this is easier said than done. But the pay-off can be great. When we show more empathy in our conversations, we have more impact in improving attitudes and behaviors. When we show others, through empathic listening, we really understand their position, we maximize the chance of progress.

## Achieving Empathy

Let's consider some basic strategies for achieving an empathic level of awareness and appreciation:

- Take off your blinders. Minimize the reactive filters that bias conversations. They are barriers to listening intently and proactively to another person.
- Ask more questions. This is how you truly understand the other person's position and eventually diagnose the problem
- Listen for more than words. Not only must we hear every word, we must also be sensitive to feelings, passion, and commitment. This comes across as much in body language and manner of expression as in words themselves. Listen for more than words when workers give evaluations of their at-risk behavior and offer recommendations for self-improvement. Listen for feelings or emotions that reflect concern for errors and commitment to change.
- Use your imagination. When you observe another person's work practices, try to view the situation from that individual's perspective. When you listen to someone explain why he or she took a risk or got injured, try to see yourself in the same predicament. Imagine what defense mechanisms *you* might use to protect *your* ego or self-esteem.
- Weigh alternatives. When you consider action plans for improvement, try to view various alternatives by putting yourself in the same "steel-toed shoes" of the other person.

We need to approach our safety coaching conversations with an empathic mindset. We want to learn what motivates someone to risk his or her safety, we want to put ourselves in the other person's place. From that understanding we can derive an action plan *we* would be willing to follow. You can do this by bringing empathy to your safety conversations. When we show more empathy in our conversations, we have more impact in improving safety-related attitudes and behaviors.

## A Consideration of Paradigms

These three new E-words regarding the human dynamics of injury prevention suggest shifts to new safety paradigms. And, these paradigm shifts provide a new set of guiding principles for achieving and sustaining an injury-free workplace.

### What is a paradigm?

Many definitions of “paradigm” have been used, some humorous, some academic, and some practical. From the author's perspective, this is one of those superfluous academic terms that is completely unnecessary.

In the context of psychological research, paradigm is used to refer to a particular experimental procedure or methodology. Three different dictionaries (*Webster's New Universal Unabridged*, *The American Heritage Dictionary*, and *The Scribner-Bantam English Dictionary*) define paradigm as a pattern, example, or model. However, words can change their meaning through usage, as discussed by S. I. Hayakawa in his instructive and provocative text *Language in Thought and Action*<sup>11</sup>. In business, paradigm has been equated with psychological terms such as perception, attitude, cognition, belief, and value.

The popular 1989 video "Discovering the Future: The Business of Paradigms" by Joel Barker<sup>12</sup> was certainly responsible for some of the new applications of the term “paradigm.” A number of articles and speeches in the safety field have supported and precipitated this change. Indeed, Dan Peterson's keynote speech at the 1993 Professional Development Conference of the American Society of Safety Engineers was entitled, "Dealing with Safety's Paradigm Shift," and followed up his earlier 1991 article in *Professional Safety* entitled "Safety's Paradigm Shift." Here Dr. Peterson claimed safety has shifted its focus to large-scale culture change through employee involvement.<sup>13</sup>

The aim of this paper is not to dissect the meaning of paradigm, nor to debate whether one or more paradigm shifts have occurred in industrial safety. Instead, this paper defines ten basic changes in belief, attitude, or perception needed to adequately address the human dynamics of safety and enable an injury-free culture. These shifts require new principles, approaches, or procedures, and will result in different behaviors and attitudes among top managers and hourly workers. The result: Empowerment for safety will increase throughout the work culture.

The shift in how paradigm is commonly defined does contain an important lesson. When we adopt and use new definitions, our “mind-set” or perception changes. In other words, we act ourselves into a new way of thinking or perceiving. This is a primary theme of people-based safety<sup>14</sup>. When employees get involved in more effective procedures to control safety, they develop a more constructive and optimistic attitude toward safety and the achievement of an injury-free workplace. Let's consider the shifts in principles, procedures, beliefs, attitudes, or perceptions needed for the three new “E-words”--empowerment, emotion, and empathy--and for keeping people safe.

### 1. From OSHA Regulations to Corporate Responsibility

Many safety activities and programs in U.S. industry are driven by OSHA (the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration) or MSHA (the Mine Safety and Health Administration) rather than by the employers and employees who benefit from an effective safety process. In other words, many in industry do "safety stuff" because the government requires it--not because it was their idea and initiative.

But people are more motivated and willing to go beyond the call of duty when they are achieving their own self-initiated goals. Ownership, commitment, and proactive behaviors are less likely when people are working to achieve goals or avoid missing deadlines set by someone else. This statement is intuitive. Just compare your own motivation when working for personal gain versus someone else's gain, or when working to earn a reward versus to avoid a penalty.

The language used to define safety programs and activities influences personal participation. Remember, we can act ourselves into an attitude. So it makes sense to talk about safety as a company mission that is owned and achieved by the very people it benefits. A safety process is not intended to benefit federal regulators. Let's work to achieve an injury-free workplace for the right reasons.

## 2. From Failure Oriented to Achievement Oriented

If you strive to meet someone else's goals rather than your own, you'll probably develop an attitude of "working to avoid failure" rather than "working to achieve success." But people are more likely to feel self-motivated and empowered when achieving success than when avoiding failure. If you have a choice between earning positive consequences (rewards) or avoiding negative consequences (penalties), you'll probably choose the positive situation. Plus, when you feel controlled by negative consequences, you often procrastinate and take a reactive rather than a proactive stance.<sup>15</sup>

This principle helps explain why more continuous and proactive attention goes to productivity and quality than to safety. Productivity and quality goals are typically stated in achievement terms, and gains are tracked and recorded as individual or team accomplishments, sometimes followed by recognition awards.

In contrast, safety goals are most often stated in avoidance terms. How many times have you heard: "We will reach our safety goal after another month without a lost-time injury."? And "keeping score" in safety means tracking and recording losses or injuries.

Measuring safety with only records of injuries not only limits evaluation to a reactive stance, it also sets up a negative motivational system that is apt to take a back seat to the positive system used for productivity and quality. Giving safety an achievement perspective (like production and quality) requires a different scoring system, as indicated by the next paradigm shift.

## 3. From Outcome Focused to Process Focused

Companies are frequently ranked according to their OSHA recordables and lost-time injuries. Within companies, work groups or individual workers earn safety awards according to outcomes—those with the lowest numbers win. Offering rewards for fewer injuries, for instance, can often reduce the *reported* numbers while not improving safety. Pressure to reduce outcomes without changing the process (or ongoing behaviors) often causes employees to cover up their injuries. How many times have you heard of an injured employee being driven to work each day to sign in and then promptly returned to the hospital or home to recuperate? This keeps the lost-time outcome numbers low but does more harm than good to the corporate culture. Likewise, failure to report even a minor first-aid case prohibits key personnel from correcting the factors that led to the incident.

A scoring system based on what people do for safety (as in a behavior-based process) not only attacks a contributing factor to most work injuries, it can also be proactive and achievement oriented. This puts safety in the same motivational framework as productivity and quality.

A misguided emphasis on outcomes rather than process is illustrated in the figure below. Although the idea of a dead person receiving a safety reward is clearly ridiculous, this type of incentive/reward process is quite common in American industry. A 1993 survey of more than 400 companies in Wisconsin revealed 58 percent used rewards to motivate safety; of these, more than 85 percent based their safety rewards on outcomes such as OSHA recordables rather than process.<sup>16</sup> These programs often bring down numbers by influencing the reporting of injuries, but rarely do they benefit the safety processes which control results.



Safety can be on equal footing with productivity and quality if it is recorded and tracked with an achievement score perceived by employees as directly controllable and obtainable. This occurs with a focus on the safety processes that can decrease an organization's injury rate, as well as an ongoing measurement system that continuously tracks safety accomplishments and displays them to the workforce.

Safety accomplishments occur in three general areas--environment, behavior, and person--with environmental successes easiest to record and track. Environmental achievements for safety range widely, from purchasing safer equipment, to correcting environmental hazards and demonstrating improved environmental audits.

Person factors are influenced by numerous situations, such as safety education, safety celebrations, and increased safety personnel. It's possible to estimate achievements in this domain by counting the occurrences of these events. A more direct assessment can occur through periodic perception surveys, interviews, or focus-group. These measurements can be rather time-consuming, though, and the reliability and validity of results from intermittent subjective surveys are equivocal. Plus, finding an improvement in perceptions does not necessarily imply an increase in safe work practices -- the human dynamic most directly linked to reducing work injuries.



Work practices can be observed, recorded, and tracked objectively.<sup>17</sup> When daily displays of behavioral records show increases in safe behaviors and decreases in at-risk behaviors, the workforce can celebrate their success of a continuously improving safety process.

#### 4. From Top-Down Control to Bottom-Up Involvement

As discussed above when introducing three new “E-words” for safety, a sustained injury-free workplace requires continual involvement from operations personnel, including wage workers. After all, these are the people who know where safety hazards are located and when the at-risk behaviors are occurring. Also, they can have the most influence in supporting safe behaviors and correcting at-risk behaviors and conditions. In fact, the ongoing processes involved in achieving injury-free need to be supported from the top but driven from the bottom. This is more than employee participation; it is employee ownership, commitment, and empowerment.

Research has shown that safe work practices can be increased and work injuries decreased with behavior-based intervention<sup>18</sup> But this research has invariably involved outside agents such as consultants to help implement and evaluate the tactics, and the projects were usually short-term and small-scale. Large-scale and long-term behavior change requires employees themselves to apply the techniques throughout their workplace. For this to happen, employees must understand the relevant behavioral-science principles and feel good about using them to prevent work injuries.

Understanding and feeling good about something brings us to considering again those person factors such as knowledge, intentions, attitudes, expectancies, and mood states. Certain dispositions or mood states, for example, influence an individual's propensity to help another person, and it's possible to increase these person factors through changing environment and behavior factors.<sup>19</sup>

In other words, an injury-free workplace requires integrating both behavior-based and person-based approaches to understand and influence the human dynamics of occupational safety. This is people-based safety<sup>20</sup> or even more appropriate, “people-powered safety.”

This paradigm shift reflects a critical concept and perspective—“inclusion”. For optimal continuous involvement of employee in processes designed to achieve and sustain an injury-free workplace, employees need to believe they: a) are heard, b) contribute, c) belong, d) are achieving, e) have some choice on the job, f) are appreciated, and g) feel empowered. When these criteria are met, workers feel included and are self-motivated to do whatever they can to keep themselves and others safe.<sup>21</sup>

Try this bottom-up involvement exercise. Ask a group of line operators or wage workers to write down their prediction of where the next workplace injury or close call will occur. Then ask them to explain why they have made their predictions and to offer some possible solutions. You may be surprised in the consistency among these reports, including a need for immediate corrective action. A variety of predictions in diverse situations can be quite disconcerting, suggesting a number of changes at both environmental and behavioral levels.

One thing is certain. This exercise will demonstrate the value of including teams of wage workers in diagnosing safety-related issues and suggesting ways to remove “an injury waiting to happen.” And when these employees see changes resulting from their suggestions, they will become more self-motivated to turn their inclusion into successful injury-free action.

## 5. From Rugged Individualism to Teamwork

An employee-driven safety process requires teamwork founded on interpersonal trust, synergy, and win/win contingencies. However, from childhood most of us have been taught an individualistic, win/lose perspective, supported by such popular slogans as "You have to blow your own horn," "Nice guys finish last," "No one can fill your shoes like you," and "It's the squeaky wheel that gets the grease." Grades in school, the legal system, and many sports also orient us to think individualism and win/lose. This is why a true team approach to safety does not come easy.



The figure above illustrates a competitive situation quite common in the workplace. Although some office environments were originally designed to promote more open communication and group interaction, physical and psychological barriers have often been erected to maintain privacy and an individualistic atmosphere. This results partially from work systems that offer more rewards for individual than group achievement. Processes and systems can be implemented to promote group behaviors and interdependence over individual behaviors and independence. These processes and contingencies are needed because the achievement and maintenance of an injury-free workplace requires more teamwork than rugged individualism.

## 6. From a Piecemeal to a Systems Approach

The long-term maintenance of an injury-free culture can only be achieved with a systems approach, including balanced attention to all aspects of the corporate culture. Dr. Deming emphasized that total quality can only be achieved through a systems approach,<sup>22</sup> and of course the same is true for safety. As suggested earlier in this paper, three basic domains need attention when designing and evaluating safety processes and when investigating the contributing factors of injuries and close calls:

- 1) *Environment* factors such as equipment, tools, machines, housekeeping, heat/cold, climate engineering;
- 2) *Person* factors such as employees' knowledge, skills, abilities, intelligence, motives, personality; and

- 3) *Behavior* factors such as complying, coaching, recognizing, communicating, and "actively caring".

Two of these system variables involve human factors. Each generally receives less attention than the environment, mostly because it's more difficult to visibly measure the outcomes of efforts to change the human factors. Some human factors programs focus on behaviors (as in behavior-based safety); others focus on attitudes (as in a person-based approach). A sustained injury-free culture requires strategic integration of these two approaches, which is people-powered safety.

### 7. From Fault Finding to Fact Finding

Blaming an individual or group of individuals for an injury-producing incident is not consistent with a systems approach to safety. Instead, an injury or close call provides an opportunity to procure and analyze facts from all aspects of the system that could have contributed to the near injury. Immediate environment, person, and behavior factors should be explored for their potential contributions, and numerous historical factors should also be considered. For example:

How common was the at-risk behavior?

How many individuals observed the at-risk behavior without intervening?

What aspects of operations and the management system supported the at-risk behavior?

Several years ago, the author helped a company investigate an injury which occurred when an employee slipped on a metal plate covering a large hole on scaffolding three stories above a concrete floor. The worker fell through the hole, and would have fallen three stories were he not able to throw out his arms and catch himself on the sides of the hole. He suffered painful cuts and scrapes, but obviously the injury could have been much worse.

Whose fault was it?

What was the "root cause" of this incident?

It was tempting to finger the welder who failed to secure the metal plate over the hole as the culprit--the root cause.

This would be piecemeal and fault finding. Instead a fact finding, systems approach was followed. What were the environmental demands, for example, that led to careless work by the welder? How many individuals had stepped on the plate, noticed it was loose, and did not report their close call? (The investigation revealed that numerous employees had been aware of the loose plate). What environment or person factors prevented people from reporting their close call with the loose plate? What processes should be put in place to facilitate observing, reporting, and correcting environmental hazards like the one contributing to this injury?

This is obviously only a partial list of questions related to a systems-level, fact-finding investigation. But it should be clear that answering these questions would be far more constructive than finding an individual to blame and perhaps punishing him or her for the mishap.

In this case, and in most other circumstances involving a personal injury, it is doubtful there was one root cause. Indeed, efforts to search for *the* root cause of an injury can be fruitless and lead to more fault finding. Many environment, behavior, and person factors contribute to the system that causes workplace injuries. Piecemeal corrective action is narrow-minded and short-sighted; systems-level corrective action can have a large-scale, long-term impact.

## 8. From Reactive to Proactive

Analyzing events preceding an injury, be it a close call or an injury, demonstrates the need to think and act proactively. Unfortunately, a proactive stance is extremely difficult to maintain, especially in a corporate culture that is increasingly complex and demanding. There is a higher and higher price tag on "free time." With barely enough time to react sufficiently to crises each day, how can we find time to be proactive?

Proactivity is especially challenging within the context of downsizing, disguised as "reengineering" in many work cultures. The worker on the following page is barely able to react effectively to daily crises. How can he be expected to think ahead and be proactive? There are no quick-fix answers, but injury prevention requires us to find solutions. This paper plants some seeds to consider for improving the human dynamics of safety, leading to the next paradigm shift.



## 9. From Quick Fix to Continuous Improvement

"Proactive" can be substituted for "reactive" only with a systems perspective and an optimistic attitude of continuous improvement through increased employee inclusion and involvement. Understanding the psychology of safety can be a great aid here. The principles and procedures reviewed here and detailed in other sources<sup>23</sup> will enable you to influence incremental changes in work practices and attitudes needed to prevent personal injuries and achieve an injury-free work site. This reflects a proactive, continuous improvement paradigm, which will surely improve your safety performance.

## 10. From Priority to Value

"Safety is our priority." This is probably the most common safety slogan found in workplaces and voiced by safety leaders, and by flight attendants prior to air travel. Many signs, pens, buttons, hats, T-shirts, and notepads display this message. No wonder safety and health professionals are surprised when the author claims safety should *not* be a priority. To justify this proclamation, consider the following explanation:

Think about a typical workday morning. We all follow a prioritized agenda, often a standard routine, before traveling to work. Some people eat a hearty breakfast, read the morning

newspaper, take a shower, and wash dishes. Others wake up early enough to go for a morning jog before work. Some grab a roll and a cup of coffee, and leave their home in disarray until they get back in the evening. In each of these scenarios the agenda--the priorities--are different. Yet there is one common activity. It's not a priority but a basic value. Do you know what it is?

One morning you wake up late. Perhaps your alarm-clock failed. You have only 15 minutes to prepare for work. Your morning routine changes drastically. Priorities must be rearranged. You might skip breakfast, a shower, or a shave. Yet every morning schedule still has one item in common. It's not a priority, capable of being dropped from a routine due to time constraints or a new agenda. No, this particular morning activity represents a *value* which we've been taught as infants, and it's never compromised. Have you guessed it by now? Yes, this common link in everyone's morning routine, regardless of time constraints, is "getting dressed."

This simple scenario shows how circumstances can alter behavior and priorities. Actually, labeling a behavior a "priority" implies its order in a hierarchy of daily activities can be rearranged. How often does this happen at work? Does safety sometimes take a "back seat" when the emphasis is on other priorities such as production quantity or quality?

### Enduring Values

It's human nature to shift priorities, or behavioral hierarchies, according to situational demands or contingencies. But values remain constant. The early-morning anecdote above illustrates that the activity of "getting dressed" is a value that is never dropped from the routine. Shouldn't "working safely" hold the same status as "getting dressed"? Safe work practices should occur regardless of the demands of a particular day.

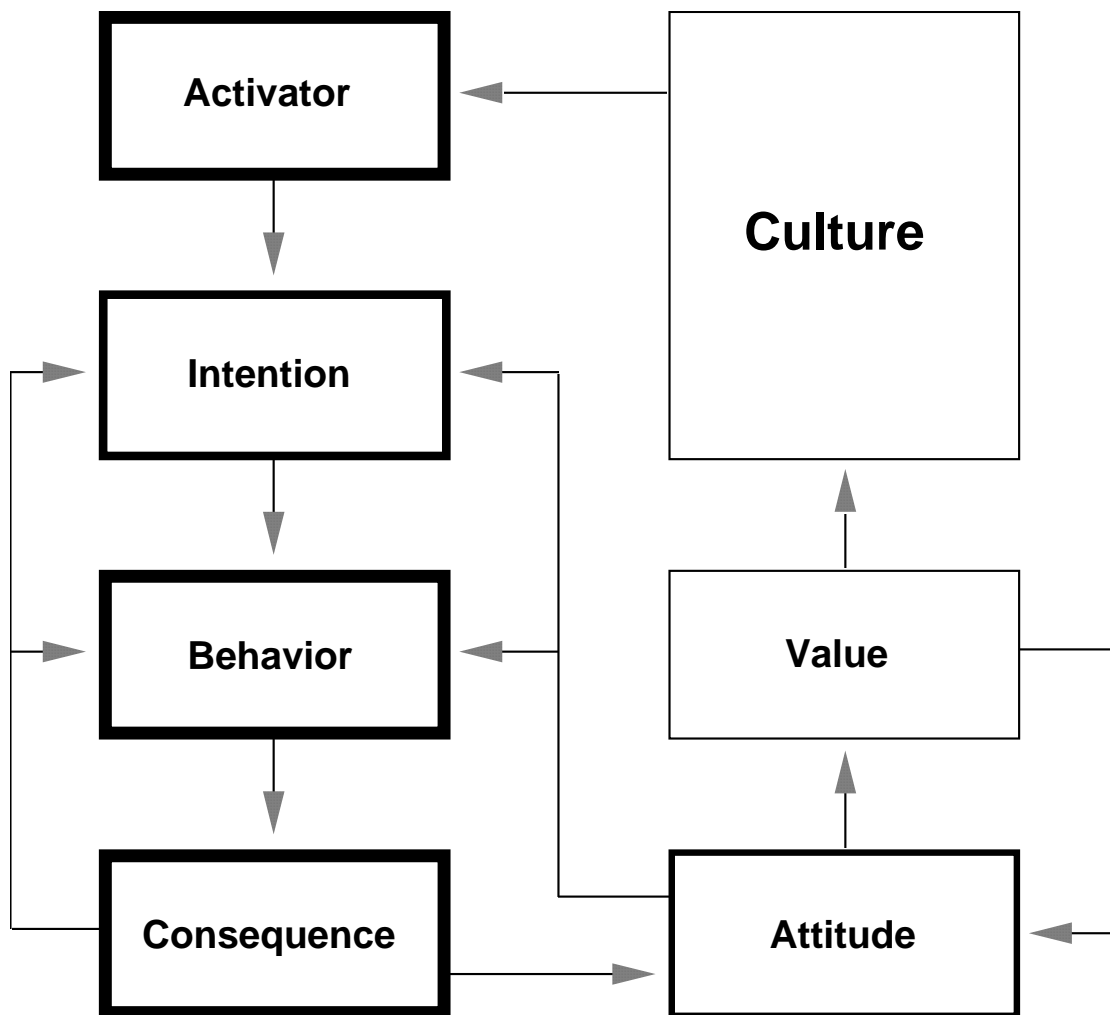
Safety should be a value linked with every activity or priority in a work routine. Safe work should be the enduring descriptive norm, whether the current focus is on quantity, quality, or cost-effectiveness as the "number one priority."

The ultimate aim of a Total Safety Culture is to make safety an integral aspect of all performance, regardless of the task. Safety should be more than the behaviors of "using personal protective equipment," more than "locking out power" and "checking equipment for potential hazards," and more than "practicing good housekeeping." Safety should be an unwritten rule, a social norm, that workers follow regardless of the situation. It should become a value that is never questioned -- never compromised.

### Start with Behavior

This of course is much easier said than done. How do you even begin to work for such lofty aims? The figure below summarizes the relationships between intentions, behaviors, attitudes, and values. It outlines a starting point and general process for developing safety as an organizational value. A key point is that attitudes and values follow from behavior. This brings us to behavior management techniques. They are the starting point for acting a person into safe thinking.

This is how it works: When you follow safe procedures consistently for every job and attribute your behavior to a voluntary self-motivated decision, you begin thinking safe. Eventually, working safe becomes part of your value system.



The figure above illustrates how attitudes and values influence intentions and behaviors directly. However, it's not cost-effective to manage attitudes and values directly in order to "think people into safe acting." Notice in the figure the different thicknesses of rectangles enclosing the terms. The thicker the border, the more measurable and manageable the human dynamic. Activators (antecedent conditions that direct behavior), behaviors, and consequences (events that follow and motivate behaviors and influence attitudes) are easiest to define, measure, and manage.

In contrast, values and culture are the most difficult to measure reliably and influence directly. Specific techniques for managing behaviors to promote supportive safety attitudes and values are detailed elsewhere.<sup>23</sup> Put them all together and eventually you will construct an integrated Total Safety Culture that can achieve and maintain an injury-free workplace.

## In Conclusion

This paper proposed ten basic shifts in perspective needed to go beyond current levels of safety excellence and eliminate all personal injuries from a work site. Each could be considered an

objective relevant to achieving an injury-free work culture. While progress toward achieving the first nine paradigm shifts can be measured and tracked, the tenth--making safety a value -- is very difficult to measure. However, it is an ideal vision and should be incorporated into our daily language.

Here's how the new paradigms fit together. Your safety achievement process should be considered a company responsibility, not a regulatory obligation. It should be achievement oriented with a focus on behaviors, supported by all managers and supervisors but driven by the line workers or operators through teamwork. A systems approach is needed, which leads to a fact-finding perspective, a proactive stance, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

These ideal perspectives reflect new principles to follow, new procedures to develop and implement. This "new safety work" will lead to different perceptions, attitudes, and even values. Ultimately, the tenth paradigm shift can be reached. When safety goes from priority to value, it won't be compromised at work, at home, or on the road. Naturally, numerous injuries will be prevented and lives saved everyday. This vision should motivate each of us to be active in the safety achievement process and then actively care for other people's safety, health, and general welfare.

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