



Rate Your “B.O.S.S.” Benchmarking Organizational Safety Strategy

By **LARRY HANSEN**

Benchmarking, the planned, deliberate process of seeking out and targeting competitive continuous improvement by emulating industry's "best practices," has swept its way into today's business planning strategy. Like most progressive management techniques, competitive benchmarking was conceived in response to the challenge for improved cost effectiveness, quality and reliability in American products. Now, however, it is being used to improve operating results across all business functions.

Defined here are key "safety benchmarks" observed and documented as success drivers. Organizational issues that truly impact safety effectiveness are addressed, and a tool for "rating" organizational issues critical to good safety outcomes is presented. Rating Benchmarks of Organizational Safety Strategy (B.O.S.S.) leads to recognition that "good" safety is "good" management, not programs. Long-term safety improvement can only be attained by addressing organizational core competencies.

For the past 20 years, U.S. business has been victim to a national sham, one that currently drains \$60 billion from national productivity. In addition, this sham has legitimized use of legislation (the hammer), rather than education (the mind), as the predominant means of achieving workplace safety. Since Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) inception, U.S. management has become entrenched in "safety by compliance" rather than "prevention

by planning." As a consequence, business now faces a sequel to the 1980s quality dilemma: *American Safety—Doing things wrong the first time.*

CURRENT PRACTICE: RELUCTANT COMPLIANCE

Today's predominant safety strategy is reluctant compliance. This translates to after-the-fact hazard detection, which (like outdated quality programs based on inspecting defects out at the end of a process) does not identify organizational errors—the true causes of accidents. The bottom line: Most safety programs are

not founded in sound management theory, have negligible impact on operational efficiency, and do not contribute to corporate productivity or profitability.

These are not new or enlightening conclusions. Managers' continued resistance to "the safety program" suggests they have recognized this reality for some time. Managers believe that safety has little impact on operational goals, is compliance-oriented, and does not support line-management objectives or desired business outcomes. Hercin lies the problem—they are correct.

In successful companies, "safe" is how things are executed continuously—not merely a topic at the monthly meeting.

As practiced today, safety does not equate with key business objectives. Line managers perceive safety as a program separate from the organizational mission, not as a "process outcome" controlled by the management system. They fail to recognize that safety (like any other process outcome) can be improved by addressing the management structures, processes and practices that generate organizational results.

BENCHMARKING DISPELS TRADITIONAL MINDSETS

To overcome this errant perception, many progressive organizations initiate benchmarking, a process of comparative measurement, to identify and target improvement. Benchmarking challenges the myopic views held within many organizations by forcing management to look beyond current traditions and seek "best available practices" (within and beyond their industry). This search allows a corporation to equate its own performance to that of others, thus dispelling traditional mindsets and not-invented-here mentalities that inhibit positive change.

The process often produces shocking realities. Corporations discover how "well" other organizations perform. They see the gap between "their way" and the "best way." Benchmarking safety clarifies the relationship between accidents and their true sources within the management system. In addition, the process identifies organizational issues and establishes safety as a line operations function. For the first time, safety becomes management and "is the process."

LET'S RATE YOUR B.O.S.S.

Ready for a reality check? Let's remove the blinders of tradition and benchmark the safety management process. The 20 responses completing the statement: "You know your safety program is effective when..." are true drivers of safety effectiveness within an organization. Comparing current performance to these practices identifies targets for change within the management process. So, how does an organization know when its safety program is effective?

BENCHMARK 1: EXECUTIVE INVOLVEMENT

Most executives do not know if their companies hold safety meetings—let

alone attend them. A successful safety effort requires more than management commitment—it demands executive involvement. Sonoco Products Co., a Hartsville, SC packaging company, reduced its corporate injury rate by 90 percent—while the national average (1975-1988) increased 14 percent. How? "We learned that simply being interested in safety is not enough," explains corporate safety director Mike Sunderland. "Sonoco managers recognize that commitment to safety, like quality, demands more than just preaching to employees. It requires actions."

At the corporate level, Sonoco's executive safety task force is comprised of staff vice presidents and chaired by the president. Safety performance is discussed during weekly executive meetings, and any vice president whose operation has experienced an injury must present an explanatory report. "That really drives home the personal responsibility and accountability for employee safety" (Minter). At Sonoco, corporate values are established by executive action. Safety is a corporate value.

BENCHMARK 2: STRATEGIC VISION

Two inseparable truths are embodied in the sayings: "Safety is created in the boardroom"; and "A rotten fish stinks from the head down." Executives are being held to increasingly higher standards of care regarding personnel policies and practices. Evidence a *Wall Street Journal* expose implicating these values in the board-directed leadership change at Sunbeam-Oster Corp. What better way for executive management to personify a corporate safety vision than to lead the effort for employee health, safety and well-being? "Vision isn't forecasting the future, it's creating the future by taking action in the present" (Collins and Porras).

In "Safety Works, So Why Don't We Use It?" Anthony Skiff identifies how strategic direction was key to a large Ohio supermarket chain's efforts to reverse high workers' compensation loss trends. In addressing the element responsible for the turnaround, a company representative replied, "We held a series of 12 safety meetings. The president attended

all 12 and had all his calls held" (Skiff). Having ultimate charge for safety within an organization is a crucial job. How many executives have personally accepted this level of responsibility?

BENCHMARK 3: FINANCIAL ORIENTATION

Line managers are generally uninformed about insurance costs. Perhaps 90 percent of supervisors and plant managers do not know what Experience Modification is or their actual loss costs. This creates a problem. If managers do not understand how accidents drive insurance costs and impact operating results, they will never be motivated to address them. When training line managers in "magic bucks" (a term aptly describing their perception of insurance), I have found that once managers understand how losses impact "cost of goods sold" and "operating expenses" (two of their key responsibilities), and ultimately drain profitability, they turn on to success.

Bob Anderson, president and principal consultant of The Worksafe Group, Laguna Hills, CA, confirms that every successful turnaround his company has managed with its clients was predicated by an executive awakening to how loss costs impact operational results. Anderson recalls a large West Coast restaurant chain that wanted to reduce its \$2 million annual workers' compensation losses. Upon completing their evaluation, the consultants met with the president and key operations executives. The consultants' presentation outlined how excessive workers' compensation losses were draining corporate profits. According to Anderson, "When the president saw the financial linkage, he almost fell off his chair. He questioned the numbers four times."

When the executives finally understood the financial ramifications involved, they incorporated safety into the organization's strategic mission on quality operations and customer service. Within two years, average losses decreased 90 percent. Bottom line: Show a line manager how he/she can increase the "bottom line" and you will find a manager who will succeed in reducing accident costs.

Here is your chance to RATE YOUR... "B.O.S.S.I!"

Instructions: Assign "5 points" to each benchmark statement that accurately reflects the current "safety reality" in your organization. All others score "0".

"YOU KNOW YOUR SAFETY PROGRAM IS EFFECTIVE WHEN: ..."

- 1 Your chief executive is: "CEO and Chair of the Safety Committee."
- 2 Your president says: "I'm in a safety meeting, hold all my calls!"
- 3 Your pre-tax profit exactly equals your reduction in accident costs!
- 4 Your corporation provides exotic travel incentives:
 - Employees: to resort destinations ... for good performance;
 - Managers: To the Chief Executives office ... for poor performance!
- 5 There are no safety costs!
- 6 Employees "volunteer" to serve on the Safety Committee.
- 7 The "E" in your E-Mission statement stands for electronic ... not a management "E" Vacation!
- 8 The reduction in your workers compensation cost equals the net payout of your "Executive Bonus Program"!
- 9 The words "Quality, Productivity, ... and Safety" appear in the same sentence in your annual report!
- 10 Safety Committee meetings ... aren't!
- 11 "Employees arrive and depart work in the same condition ... smiling!"
- 12 The ratio of "Positive Recognition Notices" to "Disciplinary Slips" in Personnel files is 8 to 1!
- 13 Employees request a planning session on company time, at company expense, at a resort hotel ... and its approved!
- 14 Employees have a \$250 personal authorization for safety — no approvals required!
- 15 There's no "time" for safety training
- 16 You complete one full year without the word "careless" appearing on a supervisory accident report!
- 17 Your general manager sets a goal for "zero accidents" ... and believes it!
- 18 Inspection reports don't identify "unsafe acts and conditions."
- 19 There is no "safety" program.
- 20 The final phase of "right sizing" is complete ... and you're still employed!

TOTAL

Scoring: Transfer each score and your total to the answer sheet (page 43) to see how you've rated the "four" drivers of organizational safety culture. Each is discussed as a benchmark activity.

Managers need to "catch people in the act of doing something good" and tell them about it. Supervisory seek-and-destroy missions should evolve into seek-and-reward sessions. The most powerful motivator in the workplace is "Thanks."

BENCHMARK 4: MEANINGFUL MEASUREMENT

DuPont Corp. has initiated numerous innovative management safety incentive and accountability programs. Occupational safety has such high priority that accident-free operations are a basic expectation of all managers. In fact, executives of operating divisions and subsidiaries must report all lost-time accidents to DuPont's CEO within hours of an occurrence.

Now, the envelope has been stretched further. Sonoco Products Co. has established a corporate policy requiring plant managers to telephone the president within 60 minutes of an injury. This "travel policy" leaves no doubt about safety's importance within these organizations. "When safety becomes a meaningful management measure, managing safety becomes meaningful." You definitely do not want to be a frequent flyer in these programs.

BENCHMARK 5: PARITY

Successful companies consider safety to be a long-term investment, producing significant payback through improved process efficiencies and reduced operational error. This is a crucial foundation. When managers do not believe that safety expenditures produce a positive return-on-investment, they will never provide the personal and financial support needed to elevate safety to a true operational equal.

PPG Industries, headquartered in Pittsburgh, PA, recognizes the need to create safety parity (safety equal to, and integrated with, all key elements of the manufacturing process). The company's New Directions Program, which is based on quality management concepts, addresses four core issues: 1) continuous improvement; 2) employer involvement; 3) excellence; and 4) integrated safety measures.

PPG's Crestline, OH facility achieves safety integration through a performance specification program. "At the Crestline plant, every work order now includes safety specifications, along with customer, packaging, and shipping and handling specifications. The safety requirements have equal status on the work order" (Durbine). At this facility, successful job completion requires strict conformance to safe practices.

On the production floor, however, all things are not created equal. Safety can become an equal only when valued on par with—and not compromised to—production demands.

BENCHMARK 6: EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION

The Cummings Jamestown Engine plant, Lakewood, NY, employs a highly effective approach to employee participation and continuous improvement.

The program's name, "JDI-KAIZEN," refers to its objective: "Just Do It Continuous Improvement." The program incorporates several progressive concepts, including an intensive five-day employee training program on continuous improvement; an emphasis on employee empowerment; and teamwork to encourage problem solving and immediate change.

Among the novel ideas incorporated in the program are "Kaizen Carts," mobile workstations equipped with flip charts, references and other problem-solving tools that allow employees to solve problems or evaluate process improvements on-the-spot. The program has produced 61 documented process improvements, leading to higher quality, lower costs, reduced cycle times, less inventory, higher efficiency, improved safety—and \$250,000 in savings. "At Cummings Jamestown Engine plant, people are making the difference. They just do it" (Taylor and Ramsey).

This level of employee interest is not common in many companies. However, if the concept of an employee safety organization was redefined to include high visibility, adequate funding, clear responsibility, true authority and ample recognition, many more employees would be willing to volunteer. Participation would improve 100 percent, and safety programming would cost nothing. Companies would actually save money because time and efficiency are money. Envision the potential savings when everyone thinks of a better way and then just does it.

BENCHMARK 7: MISSION

Try this: Ask the next five people that pass by the safety office to read the corporate safety policy. What will they find?

1) An executive mission statement that clearly depicts a desired future (safe) state for the corporation and contains an action orientation capable of driving employee behaviors to attain it.

2) A "reality statement" that lacks emotion, is uninspiring, contains canned jargon and serves to remind employees of how things aren't.

Most readers will find number 2. Many safety policies are boilerplate, boring and borrowed (some even include the originator's name)—and employees know it. The policies typically contain idealistic rhetoric and conclude with: "No job is so important or schedule so rushed that we can't take the time to do it safely." Employee interpretation: "Yeah, right. Why can't they design it right in the first place so I don't have to take time to fix it out here?"

A successful journey begins with a specific destination in mind. If manage-



"This is Red Herring, he's responsible for safety around here!"

ment has not created a clear road map, the journey starts now, with an exercise in safety "visioning." If you look forward, you can see, and will create, the future.

BENCHMARK 8: GAIN-SHARING

How can meaning be added to the phrase, "Safety Pays"? If a manager's performance in controlling accident costs is to improve, build chargebacks into his/her bonus and make it "hurt so good." Remember, what gets measured gets done; what gets measured and rewarded gets done well. One caution: What gets measured and rewarded gets done well, even if it is done wrong. As Peter Drucker warns, "Make sure managers are doing the right things, not just doing things right." No slogans, posters, games, contests or safety incentives, please.

Why stop with executives? Why not initiate gain-sharing for all employees? According to Princeton professor Alan Blinder, "Trickle Up" economics (i.e., making employee compensation contingent upon profitability) can raise labor productivity from 3 to 11 percent ("Watching Out for Business"). Generally, it is better to give than to receive. In this case, why not do both?

BENCHMARK 9: SHARED VALUES

In Rome, NY, history is being rewritten—the Great Pyramids are no longer

only in Egypt. The Rome Cable Corp., Rome, NY, recognizes the need for equality among quality, productivity and safety, three critical measures of management proficiency, and emphasizes the three values in its corporate vision. Elevating safety to equal status on the production floor and income statement must be forced through executive action.

President Shep Bayland emphasizes the values by sending clear, repetitive messages that quality, productivity and safety must co-exist for real (long-term) profit to ensue. In 1992, the "value" of safety equated to more than \$212,000 (an insurance dividend earned due to reduced accident losses). At a two percent margin, that is equivalent to an additional \$10 million in sales—a welcome contribution to profit and a true value.

BENCHMARK 10: COMPELLING MESSAGE

Safety committees are often ineffective in addressing accidents. Why? Because accidents are caused by the management system and "real managers don't do safety committees." Accidents are merely symptoms of flawed operational planning rooted in the management process. Safety can only be effectively addressed in corporate operational meetings.

Mike Gleason, vice president of operations for Finch Pruyn Paper Corp., Glens

Falls, NY, opens each operations meeting with discussion of plant safety performance. It is no coincidence that Finch Pruyn has maintained a low Experience Modification (.45 range). This affords the company significant insurance savings and a competitive advantage. In successful companies, "safe" is how things are executed continuously—not merely a topic at the monthly meeting.

BENCHMARK 11: EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION

"Happy faces" are scarce in many workplaces, which signals that the safety program (and most likely other aspects of the operation) is in trouble. Hank Sarkis, president of The Reliability Group, a management consulting firm, has compiled statistical data confirming "happiness in the workplace" as the primary factor correlating with good accident experience. Hal Rosenbluth, president of Rosenbluth International Inc. and co-author of *The Customer Comes Second*, also identifies "employee happiness" as the single issue from which all other organizational results flow. Rosenbluth believes that companies earn employees' poor attitudes and maintains that employee attitudes produce the organization's ultimate outcomes. "We must take employee happiness seriously. Without it, eventually everything else breaks down" (Rosenbluth and Peters).

Does this "soft stuff" stand up to

Incident rates merely measure how bad a company can be and still be called good. Successful companies emphasize continuous improvement to drive results toward zero defects.

"hard" number crunching, however? Dean Witter Reynolds recently found that, had investors purchased stock in companies that treated employees well, they would have earned 17 percent more than had they invested in Standard & Poor's Index Fund" (Maurer). Certainly a clear illustration of what a smile is worth.

BENCHMARK 12: POSITIVE RECOGNITION

The psychology of motivation has not progressed significantly in the field of management—at least not at the first-line level. Although numerous studies confirm the power of positive recognition, discipline remains the first tool of choice for "managing" (aka "mugging") employee behavior. "Studies show that 87 percent of all feedback is negative. Traditional management theory has done little to rectify this situation" (Kinn).

Traditional theory fails to recognize that "discipline" is derived from the word "disciple," hardly a negative connotation. Managers need to "catch people in the act of doing something good" and tell them about it. Supervisory seek-and-destroy missions should evolve into seek-and-reward sessions.

In *A Great Place to Work*, Robert Levering reports how Emery Air Freight was losing \$1 million annually because employees were shipping small packages individually, rather than combining them in larger containers for less expensive bulk shipment. Management's answer: A program of positive consequences and feedback. The result: Losses were nearly eliminated. The most powerful (yet least used) motivator in the workplace—"Thanks."

BENCHMARK 13: TEAMWORK

Richard Costello, manager of General Electric's (GE) Corporate Marketing Communications, challenged GE's Business Information Center to change its methods, management approaches and operational results. To help the group "discover its future," he sent the staff (on company budget) to Epcot Center in Orlando, FL. The result: A highly effective, self-directed work team. The point: When something is important to the organization, make it important to people by making people important. Is safety important to employees in your organization—and vice versa?

BENCHMARK 14: EMPOWERMENT = TRUST

Employee empowerment is essential to operational success. However, employees can only be empowered when funds are available to fuel innovation. Estimates suggest that 90 percent of all safety hazards can be corrected for less than \$50, a nominal sum when compared to the average cost of an accident (\$19,000+).

Zytec Corp. employees can spend up to \$1,000 (per occasion) to solve problems and/or improve operations—without executive authorization. Imagine what could be accomplished if the workforce was empowered with only 25 percent of that amount. Imagine employees showing supervisors how they solved safety problems, rather than waiting for crippled suggestion systems or backlogged maintenance schedules.

Zytec also employs a unique strategic management tool—trust. And, it is not abused because the basic freedom, not the amount, is what counts! The next great reformation will involve employees and their minds. All that is needed is a little management "seed money."

BENCHMARK 15: ENABLEMENT

Although knowledge has become a key competitive strategy in industry, many still believe that safety training is a function of "time" rather than comprehension, and that lunch periods, breaks, weekends and shift changes are the only "time" for safety. William Lareau, a noted quality author, feels that U.S. industry trains its employees to fail by basing training on duration rather than on skills attained. Programs that provide everyone with an equal amount of training only ensure that no one's needs are fully met. In Japan, employee training differs completely—proficiency is the ultimate measure.

No one would likely debate the value of training in shaping safe work practices. Yet, managers continue to commit only minimal time to safety training. "We need a supervisory training program to deal with this 'critical issue,' but it can't take more than an hour" is a common remark. For employees, the average is probably closer to 15 minutes.

Joanne McCree, human resources representative for IBM's Rochester, MN facilities, says, "People must be enabled as well as empowered." Unfortunately, industry's track record does not mirror

this advice. In a November 1992 survey of 100 small and mid-size companies, Arthur Anderson Inc. and National Small Business United Trade Assn. asked how small businesses should achieve improved productivity. The most popular answer, "Provide better training." When asked what steps these companies had actually taken to improve productivity during the past 12 months, however, training was not mentioned ("If Training is the Answer . . ."). The bottom line: Safety performance cannot genuinely change in one hour or less, as current injury statistics clearly illustrate.

BENCHMARK 16: PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

Tom Peters identifies the phenomenon of a management awakening as "a blinding flash of the obvious." When the manufacturing process is examined, it becomes clear that management controls all vital functions, including employee selection, process design, material designation, work scheduling, environmental control and organizational culture. When accidents occur, however, the "blinding flash" conclusion is: "Damn those careless employees."

Wrong! Employees sustain injuries. Accidents belong to the system, and the system belongs solely to management. Audits of supervisors' accident investigation reports often reveal that more than 40 percent typically cite "employee carelessness" as the accident cause.

To truly improve safety, start at the top, otherwise the real source of problems is being ignored. W. Edwards Deming assigned 90 percent of all process outcomes (such as accidents) to common causes—causes inherent to the system—not to individual behavior. If the company's accident investigation process is not unveiling system failures, it is not producing accurate information. The only acceptable alternative is to assign all accident causes to "management carelessness." Then, the investigation system would be correct at least 90 percent of the time (which beats what industry is currently doing).

BENCHMARK 17: CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Many companies set safety goals based on incident frequency and severity (aka "kill rates"). This process drives efforts to mediocrity—we aspire to be average. Incident rates are nothing more than measures of how bad a company

can be and still be called good. Successful companies emphasize continuous improvement to drive results toward zero defects.

General Motors Corp., under the safety leadership of Mike Taubitz, has abandoned safety by the numbers (incident rates), and instead focuses on continuous improvement strategies. This approach eliminates tolerance of average performance and challenges ultimate excellence. Safety, like quality, is a journey, not a destination. The key: Being on the right road, heading in the right direction.

BENCHMARK 18: PROBLEM SOURCING

More than any other activity, inspections deter organizations from attaining true safety improvement. Inspections are the core of most traditional programs and typically consume an organization's safety focus. Unfortunately, inspections focus on the wrong sources. They address accident symptoms, rather than true causes, which lie upstream in a process and are distant in both time and proximity from the hazard.

Causes are embedded within the management system, which inspections, as currently conducted, do not address. If industry would adopt Deming's philosophy and cease reliance on inspections, safety could be designed into processes. This would eliminate the effort wasted in inspecting hazards out—an activity that keeps many practitioners busy, yet does not solve problems.

If an organization demands inspections, move them off the production floor and into the executive offices. With a fine tooth comb, inspect policies, directives, procedures, goals, budgets, planning processes, training programs, management development plans, staffing, organization charts, job descriptions, communication systems, scheduling, recognition and reward programs. Plenty of real accident causes will be found.

BENCHMARK 19: ASSIMILATION

Companies with good accident experience recognize that safety is "good business, not programs." Traditional safety programs do not exist in these companies for one reason—they are not needed.

The Potsdam Paper Corp., Potsdam, NY, may (on the surface) appear to lack the trappings of traditional safety programs (incentives, rules, posters, etc.). Yet, the company does not experience accidents. Potsdam's approach involves participative management and teamwork—safety is a function of "the process," not a separate "program." As a result, employee involvement is high, hazards are controlled, and accidents do not drain productivity. All positive benefits, without a safety "program."

BENCHMARK 20: ALIGNMENT

Congratulations! You have passed the ultimate test (unlike your more traditional peers). You have proven your ability to lead a corporation to success and savings by realizing that safety is not one thing, it is everything—and it is called effective management. Welcome to the team. You'll fit in just fine. But where?

Two important points must be considered when deciding where to position safety within the organization. First, safety must be recognized as "the management process." Second, it is not where safety responsibility is placed within the organization (whatever form it takes), but rather that it is placed everywhere. Progressive companies align resources to achieve results; they don't create structure. The power of influence will always outperform the power of position. If the president's voice is needed to accomplish this, serious organizational problems exist. Time to pull back and start again, this time from the bottom.

P.S. Start packing your desk, we're moving you out of the stockroom, tool room, dispensary, guard shack or that obscure cubicle. You're one of us now. Welcome to the team! ■

B.O.S.S. Scoring

"Focused Leadership"

- 1 ___ Executive Involvement
- 2 ___ Strategic Vision
- 3 ___ Financial Orientation
- 4 ___ Meaningful Measurement
- 5 ___ Parity
- ___ Subtotal 1-5

"Communications"

- 6 ___ Employee Participation
- 7 ___ Mission
- 8 ___ Gain Sharing
- 9 ___ Shared Values
- 10 ___ Compelling Message
- ___ Subtotal 6-10

"Human Relations"

- 11 ___ Employee Satisfaction
- 12 ___ Positive Recognition
- 13 ___ Teamwork
- 14 ___ Empowerment
- 15 ___ Enablement
- ___ Subtotal 11-15

"Integration"

- 16 ___ Process Improvement
- 17 ___ Continuous Improvement
- 18 ___ Problem Sourcing
- 19 ___ Assimilation
- 20 ___ Alignment
- ___ Subtotal 16-20
- ___ Total 1-20

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