

"Passing a Safety Excellence 'CAT SCAN'"

by:

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In our work with companies striving to become Safety Excellence organizations, we've learned that the biggest impediment to achieving improved performance is an inability to overcome the conventional 'wiz-dumbs' of safety (wrong headed thinking that impedes progress in the right direction) which inhibit organizational change. John Drebing, organizational consultant says: "You attain the next level of excellence by changing who you are...and you change who you are, by changing what you do." We've learned that there is one additional preface to affecting 'sustainable change', and that is: "You will only change what you do, when you are willing to change what you believe!"

To truly impact organizational performance (and results), safety leaders must change 'what's inside the boxes', the basic beliefs, values, and prevailing assumptions of their organizations. James Champy, author of 'Re-engineering Management' commenting on the limited results generated from corporate 're-engineering' initiatives, observed: "Much of American management doesn't seem willing or equipped to address directly what is often at the real core of operational problems...MINDSET"! To achieve safety excellence, the safety practitioner must facilitate 'transformational' change. By transformational, we don't mean the ordinary run of the mill type of change in conditions and practices, but rather, change of the, frame bending, mind altering type...change that impacts values, systems, manager practices, and structure. Safety leaders must guide their organizations through a series of 'Critical Attitude Transitions'...an organizational 'CAT Scan' so to speak. Following are twelve 'Critical Attitude Transitions' and subsequent actions requisite to attaining safety excellence performance:

CAT #1 – A shift from believing 'employees are the problem', to understanding 'process is the solution'.

1. Slash the Employee Training budget! Stupid people aren't the problem! Double the 'Leadership and Management Development' budgets...enough said! Well, maybe just a word or two more are in order. Training office staff, shipping clerks, and grounds keepers about the hazards of a confined space, fitting a respirator, or how to lock-out process equipment wastes their time, and your money...as do most of the other eleven pre-scheduled compliance topics, which have little bearing on most people's work...yet are obligated to get 'a check' on the corporate audit score.

CAT #2 – A shift from blaming the victims, to holding the guilty accountable.

2. Discontinue Supervisory Accident Investigations...they rarely identify the 'root cause' of organizational accidents--unless, of course you're willing to put them behind one-way mirrors, bring in a senior manager line-up, and grant them full immunity. They're supervisors...they're not stupid!

CAT #3 – A shift from ‘SAFE’ as an outcome of a program, to SAFE as an outcome of management systems.

3. **Stick your nose EVERYWHERE it belongs.** Encroach upon the ‘Turfs’ of other functions (sucking out redundancy with a straw), create discomfort with your insurance carrier and brokers (by demanding they do something for those commissions), spend money from one budget account to cover the legitimate needs of another (by fixing problems) and, be willing to sacrifice the most sacred cows and long standing bureaucracies of the organization. If your CEO fires you, CONGRADULATIONS! - It worked.

CAT #4 – A shift from ‘Safety’ positioned as a staff function, to ‘Safety’ integrated into the line management operations.

4. **Re-structure your organization.** Require that ‘shared ownership’ replace ‘forced accountability’. Build unified business systems (function to function), and collaborative processes (line and staff) NOT functional departments! We all may not be in the same boat...but we are all in the same ocean. Imagine washing dishes at home. Does anyone have a children’s dishwashing department, a husband’s dishwashing department and a wife’s dishwashing department? ...OR do we just have one process, with one set of tools and equipment to do one task? None of us does anything so complex at the task level that it requires a damned department...or silo...or island...or smoke stack—I think you get the gist.

CAT #5 – A shift from ‘managing’ by rules, to ‘leading’ by values.

5. Eliminate ‘Rules Trolls’ and the folly they produce. Rules are made to address 5% of the people (who don’t follow them), and they alienate the other 95% (who don’t need them). Replace rules with ‘values based’ process guidelines that delineate systematic methods to be taken by ‘PEOPLE’ to reduce risk. The phrase “Thou Shalt” shall be reserved for a single purpose – “Thou Shalt refrain from using the phrase Thou Shalt”!

CAT #6 – A shift from ‘tolerating excuses’ to ‘obligating performance’.

6. Eliminate, now and forever, the word 'ACCIDENT' from the corporate vocabulary. The term ‘Accident’ is too commonly perceived (and used) by managers as ‘a fortuitous, unintended, unexpected, 'S-happens' event, a/k/a- an excuse. Replace it with the word 'incident or operational error', i.e., a foreseeable, predictable and very 'manageable' event manifesting from a series of operational oversights. Now that all the excuses have been eliminated...hold managers accountable for improving their process and minimizing operational error.

CAT #7 – A shift from oppressing (via policy, practice and budget) employee involvement to empowering employee innovation.

7. **Grant all employees a ‘no approvals required’ purchase authority.** Five hundred dollars would be good, a thousand much better! Duct tape and cardboard are nice accouterments for the shipping dock, but far too much of it is used to ‘retro-fix’ production processes and improve workstations. If employees can outperform the brightest ergonomists with duct tape and cardboard, imagine what they can do with a ‘no red tape’ spending authority.

Note: Allow all employees to trade their authority amongst one another in order to address needs of higher cost and invite the management team to attend an ongoing lesson in teamwork.

CAT #8 – A shift from encouraging adversarial conflict, to enabling cooperative partnerships.

- 8. De-lawyer your business.** Run an Accounts Payable printout for all expenses flagged as legal services. If purchasing doesn't categorize expenses this way – force them to start TODAY! Lawyers propagate costs. For every legal dollar spent, there will be more brokered to related service providers, and more yet expended on untracked conflict between the organization, and its employees, service providers, vendors and suppliers.

CAT #9 – A shift from Safety ‘by chance’, to Safety ‘by design’.

- 9. Donate the BINGO game and other counter-productive games of chance to the local retirement home!** Then design meaningful programs that incentivize and reward people based on desired behavior change, and achievement of goaled and quantifiable activities, which are designed to produce better results...not the fortuitous chance of someone holding a card with a lucky number ...BINGO!

CAT #10 – A shift from measurements that ‘drive down (reported) numbers’, to metrics that ‘drive down costs’.

- 10. Goal a 300% increase in your ‘Recordable Incident Rate’ for the next calendar year.** Don't cause more injuries, demand more reporting! ...and then ignore the OSHA classification and focus on treating the injured person with respect while aggressively trending, analyzing and preventing the root causes of the incidents being reported. In fact, issue an incentive award for every incident reported, irrespective of severity (see item 9 above). And, by the way, Goal a 30% reduction in workers' compensation costs during the same calendar year...you'll beat it by a mile!

CAT # 11 – A shift from sub-optimizing performance via discipline to optimizing productivity via reinforcement.

- 11. Stop attempting to ‘discipline’ people into high performance.** ‘Whack a Mole’ sometimes produces winners at carnivals and State Fairs...but is always sub-optimizing in the workplace. People strive to achieve higher levels of performance when they 'wanna'-- are motivated to do so. When they are told they ‘gotta...or else’, they devote the greater part of their energy and efforts to getting even! And, they generally will, without you're having the slightest clue. Ever wonder why it takes the incumbent practitioner four months to locate their predecessor's work?

CAT #12. A shift from ‘financing loss’ into the future, to ‘eliminating loss’ in the present.

- 12. Attack your Risk Finance Allocation System.** Demand access to your company's risk finance allocation system. Challenge any/all use of insurance methodologies employed to allocate all costs

of risk. Insurance is designed to spread risk, and finance losses into the future...not provoke action on loss causes today. In doing so, it creates a false sense of security, raises ultimate cost, and spreads acceptance and apathy amongst the proactive.

Of course, for those that can't pass the 'SCAN'...there are always alternatives. If an organization, over the long run, is unwilling to accept these 'mind-shifts of excellence', or are unprepared to implement the transformational changes they require, there are still a number of options available. Among the more common are:

- Increase the annual Workers' Compensation Premium budget.
- Beef-up orientation and training expense to cover turnover.
- Add staff to the claim administration function.
- Increase the Personnel Department's recruitment budget.
- Hire more lawyers (my cousin is looking for work).
- Set higher production quotes to offset loss costs, and
- Lower the bar on profit margin projections! (Just spin the annual report).

DECISIONS, DECISIONS, DECISIONS...Someone's got to make them!

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