

# Hither & Thither

104<sup>th</sup> Area Support Group Safety Office, Volume 3, December 2002

## Safety Culture: Sustaining the Strategy

By Gary W. Helmer

Beyond a solid agenda on paper (standing operating procedures, regulations, policies, and laws), a good safety program must include behavioral based elements. People's behaviors are a direct reflection of their backgrounds and experiences, and the appropriate modification of those behaviors to enhance the safety and welfare of others is the task that each of us face. We are continually challenged to strengthen and develop a safety culture that sustains the caring leader's safety strategy.

Dr. E. Scott Geller teaches a three-step program of, "...shaping, selling, and studying for continuous improvement." He writes, "The key to shaping is to give a positive consequence for closer and closer approximations to the target behavior." And that you must, "...target the behavior you want, observe carefully for successive approximations to the target, and use positive consequences to reward improvement." Our award system envelopes the idea that excellent performance be rewarded, and certainly that should be supported in a practical way. However, we must first teach what rewardable deeds are, and then get people to strive to achieve them. We must "shape" their behavior in a positive, productive way that benefits them and the organization as a whole.

Behavioral changes involve "selling" as Geller explains, "How we talk

about a safety improvement process influences how we and others feel about the process. In other words, we need to sell the process to ourselves and others. Selling includes talking about a behavior-change technique or process in ways that sound good." A daunting task to say the least, this discipline requires us to have a product that we feel strongly enough about to warrant purveying it to those around us – every single person we come in contact with. It can't be a haphazard, unorganized approach, but must encompass all manner of legitimate marketing, advertising, and publicity available. We need to get people to appreciate the need for what we are peddling and to want to supply it to others as well.

Geller further states that, "We need to do our homework before implementing a process, and we must systematically observe the impact of the process throughout its implementation." His "DO IT" theory on studying calls for us to: "Define one or more target behaviors to monitor for possible improvement; observe target behavior(s); intervene to improve the target; and evaluate your observations before, during, and after the intervention to determine the impact of your attempts to improve the target behaviors(s)." Studying therefore involves observing, reading, listening, and then acting upon peoples' concerns, problems, and suggestions.

Of course, as with any element of study there must be some sort of evaluation. How is what we do or are doing effecting the organization? Are the procedures we have introduced or might initiate conducive to a safer environment? Are there better ways to do the

things we are already doing? Is the organization prepared for and open to any changes that we might promote? How do we measure our progress or counter any regression? And, how do we capture these answers and more?

## The Barriers

As with any program, especially one that invokes change, barriers will consistently pop up and we are forced to navigate these predictable bumps in the road. Lack of enthusiasm, minimal coordination, reductions in manpower, insufficient funding, limited educational programs, inadequate support, and miscommunications are all obstacles to the success of our plans. The challenge we face is how to overcome these problems and successfully proliferate a safety way of life. "People do not resist change -- they resist being changed."

## Opportunity and Risk

So, what is a safety culture? Simply stated, it is a culture based on the premise that safety is the priority, it is the way of life. All activities and processes are accomplished with safety in mind. Risk assessments are done, hazards are identified and mitigation implemented, and everyone shares in the practice. Risk management is integrated into each and every activity at all levels of the organization. Without a committed management-employee-community relationship, safety takes a back seat that results in increased injuries and losses of equipment.

When safety is ignored, accidents occur, and accidents cost money. Just how much is hard to say and debatable, but they are expensive.

# Hither & Thither

104<sup>th</sup> Area Support Group Safety Office, Volume 3, December 2002

Each dollar spent on the direct cost of an accident is exponentially increased by the indirect costs such as: Productivity reductions, medical treatment, lost or broken equipment repair and replacement, investigative expenditures, insurance rate increases, loss of morale, increased employee absences, and so on. And worse yet, just what are the costs of a permanent injury or loss of life?

## The Stakeholders

We are obliged to be accountable for our own safety, but we also have a duty to protect others. Managers, supervisors, employees, family members, guests, and the community at large all rely on our expertise in providing sound safety practices with equitable implementation. However, we cannot do it alone and everyone must share in the responsibility for others.

### Our Needs

Each of us needs a safe and healthful community and workplace in which to grow and prosper. Our needs as humans, according to Maslow, include:

- ❖ Physiological. These include food, water, air, and generally being well physically. These come first in a person's needs.
- ❖ Safety and security. Once our physiological needs are satisfied the need for security becomes active. Often this need does not manifest itself until we are in danger or at a heightened state of caution. Adults need to be more cognizant of safety and diligent in protecting children because of the child's relative inability to comprehend dangers.

- ❖ Love, affection, and belonging. With our physiological and safety needs met love, affection, and belonging emerge. Maslow stated that people seek to overcome feelings of loneliness and alienation that involve both giving and receiving love, affection, and a sense of belonging.
- ❖ Esteem. Next, we seek both self-esteem and for the esteem a person gets from others. Humans have a need for stability, self-respect, and the admiration of others. This gives us self confidence and the feeling of being of value to the community.
- ❖ Self-actualization. Reaching this level of need means all other needs have been satisfied. Self-actualization is a person's need to be and do that which that person most wants. You often hear people asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" At times we are restless and experiment with education, recreation, relationships, careers, etc. Eventually, most of us find our niche and take steps to perpetuate our dreams. Those who can't or don't, end up feeling edgy, tense, and restless – frequently seeking to move on. It is easy to recognize actual hunger and thirst, deficiencies in safety, not being loved, or a lack of esteem, but it is not always clear what a person wants when there is a need for self-actualization.

To make sure all of our requirements are met, we must coordinate between agencies and amongst the people within the community to make a concerted

effort to proliferate useful and constructive safety measures in all of our activities.

As safety-minded individuals we need to:

- Assess and control hazards.
- Appraise and expand safety training needs and awareness topics, keep training current – constantly seeking additional education, and educate the community on safety-related topics.
- Communicate with the public regarding safety activities.
- Develop safety rules, policies, and procedures and enforce them equitably.
- Evaluate our safety programs on a recurring basis and make changes where necessary to make them most effective.
- Inspect the community; workplaces, housing, play areas, schools, etc.
- Review incidents and accidents, injuries and illnesses to develop adequate precautions in the prevention of recurrences.
- Motivate all personnel to create and support a viable safety way of life throughout the community.

## Values

We all have them – some more than others I'm afraid but that's another story. Suffice it to say that we all grow up with an innate value system frequently modified throughout our lives. Some common values are:

- Safety
- Trust
- Honesty
- Integrity
- Loyalty

# Hither & Thither

104<sup>th</sup> Area Support Group Safety Office, Volume 3, December 2002

- Openness
- Peace
- Respect
- Ethics
- Dedication
- Self-sacrifice
- Reliability
- Responsibility
- Professionalism
- Communications
- Consideration
- Commitment
- Determination

There are many others of course, but these encompass the principles we most associate with in our lives. Our predicament as safety professionals is how to affect a value system amongst individuals – each having his or her own that may already be set in stone. We must realize of course, that not all of our beliefs are the same beliefs others hold. We each see the world differently and cannot expect to believe that all will respond the same.

## The Process

Having a safe and healthful community and workplace involves many programs, policies, procedures, and people. It is not a limited, short engagement but a continual process that must be modified judiciously and regularly to be effective.

First things first: The leader needs to be the number one player - the leader is the safety officer and he or she needs to continually support safety procedurally and fiscally. Visit your superior (regularly) and get his or her strategies for safety, and conversely, keep them abreast of trends and other key safety-related information. Know how the boss thinks and acts when it comes

to the welfare of the persons within the organization. Then and only then, can you prepare your support of that strategy.

People need to know that there is a safety program. Being proactive in advertising and publicizing our safety programs is essential. Use every means available to you such as newspapers, periodicals, audio/visual media, websites, newsletters, bulletin boards, town hall meetings, councils, and safety or community fairs - be seen and be visible. Let everyone know who you are and what you represent - don't be shy. You are instrumental in preventing serious problems within the scope of your responsibilities and you must not take this obligation lightly!

## Developing the Process

Every organization should adopt a safety code of ethics as part of the process of strengthening the safety culture. The National Safety Council recognizes this and states emphatically that safety has to be "the core value" of any organization. A version in use presently includes:

- ? Safety is our highest core value.
- ? The organization will lead the safety improvement process.
- ? Safety is a shared responsibility of everyone in our organization.
- ? We will not let any known unsafe act continue or adverse conditions exist without immediately taking corrective action to eliminate the hazard or mitigate the risk.
- ? Safety performance is a key indicator of organizational excellence, and will be incorporated into all of our processes.

- ? We will communicate safety performance openly with all employees, family members, and guests.
- ? All employees will be given the knowledge and skills to perform their jobs and activities in a safe manner.
- ? We will extend our safety efforts beyond the workplace to include our transportation, recreation, homes, and communities.
- ? We will continually strive to improve our safety and health programs.

Each subordinate element should be given a copy of the code of ethics and asked to display it in a prominent place as well as share it with their employees, and family members. Moreover, every person needs to live by the code and be active in support of it.

## Keeping In Focus

Developing and implementing sound safety practices is required to augment and support the array of policies, procedures, laws, and regulations that are published. Granted, there is a lot out there but not every situation is or can be addressed. Suffice it to say that you will have to develop local rules particular to the nature of your business unit's mission and activities. Many documents must then be supplemented as the authority extends down to the lowest levels of the organization. Have the flexibility in your publications to modify them as new situations occur and as you gain experience in the operating environment.

Keeping accurate records is a must; primarily for statistical purposes but

# Hither & Thither

104<sup>th</sup> Area Support Group Safety Office, Volume 3, December 2002

also to cover any legal hurdles that may crop up. Statistics provide us a very useful vehicle in developing mitigation tools such as training and education, modification of existing requirements, implementation of new rules, and elimination/reduction of repeat incidents/accidents.

Eliminate programs that are historically unsuccessful. If you are repeating the same scenarios time after time and seeing no practical results, it is time to significantly modify the program. Look at other agencies that have similar operating requirements and borrow their successful programs – most are quite willing to share a success story.

Safety councils and meetings are a critical part of any reasonable safety program. Safety-related councils are required by regulations and laws and serve as the key focal points for the overall safety program. The various safety and occupational health advisory councils, aviation safety councils, health promotions' councils, and hazardous materials meetings are organized to identify and solve potential safety and environmental problems, promote occupational safety and health within your area of responsibility, and to coordinate accident prevention efforts. To ensure the success of a particular council, delegate the appropriate entities for membership to the council and invite the proper persons to attend council meetings – people that can be effective and able to get things done.

## Some Tips for Success

- Get connected. Become an active participant, visible and credible.
- Know who you are dealing with. Get to know the people within the business units you manage and let them get to know you.
- Advocate respect for authority by enforcing the policies fairly and equitably.
- Expect people to adhere to the rules.
- Walk the walk, talk the talk. The worst thing in the world is not to adhere to your own policies. Once the rule is broken, the standard has changed.
- Reward excellence and advocate support of a viable awards program throughout the community.
- Teach the right behavior, the right way of doing things. It is difficult to unlearn, so ensure it is taught right the first time.
- Talk, listen, then listen some more. People have a lot to say when it comes to their welfare and you owe it to them to actively listen to their concerns.
- Take action – never wait until it is too late.
- Care, and teach others to care.

People, by our very nature, want a safe and healthful setting. Often, the problem is that we don't know how or haven't got the tools to ensure we maintain the right environment. Get everyone involved; listening to the safety issues and taking action, ensuring that managers are committed to supporting safety at all levels, holding all personnel accountable for their actions, and making safety part of every process will all help

develop a culture that sustains the strategy. *gwh/02*

**Your questions and comments are always welcome. Contact me at:**

**Commander  
104th Area Support  
Group  
AETV-HUG-S  
Unit 20193  
CMR 470, Box 0001  
APO AE 09165-0001**

**DSN: 314-322-1470  
49-6181-881470**

[gary.helmer@us.army.mil](mailto:gary.helmer@us.army.mil)

**Visit us at:**

[www.104thasg.hanau.army.mil](http://www.104thasg.hanau.army.mil)

### **A Parting Thought**

"Be professional, amateurs sell products but professionals sell solutions to problems."

**Thanks!**