

## Thoughts on the Profession... and Making a Difference

Dissatisfied safety manager, it's time to heal thyself. Here are 10 ways to make a real difference in your organization.

**B**oy, do we have some good news for you! A national reader's poll conducted to "take the pulse" of the profession has just confirmed that job satisfaction among safety practitioners has plummeted to an all-time low... now hovering in the 20 percentile range.

"Hey, I thought you said you had good news?"

We do! And it's this... If we were kings and had "head-lobbing" power, we'd fire most of these whiners hunched down in fear, protecting the status quo, complaining about the very bureaucracies that grant them purpose and sliding in backwards every week to pick up their paychecks!... *And, we just saved a bunch of money on our car insurance!*

Almost 80 percent dissatisfied - that's a big number! What is buried in these statistics, and those that comprise them (been to a local safety council meeting lately?) is that they complain they aren't supported, aren't listened to and haven't received their due respect from senior management. Yet, in the next breath, they openly acknowledge that they haven't expanded their knowledge base, explored new strategies, dug-in their heels of conviction, and are fearful of "pushing back" in their organizations. They simply accept their plight and rationalize their boss's view of them as window dressing or a necessary expense (for now), and then have the nerve to claim they're underpaid!

The problem with most under-performers in any profession, including

this one, is the reason for their problem. They're so comfortable making money doing it the way it has always been done that they find it easier to apply old thinking to new problems, and are content in doing more of what hasn't worked before... more of the 'SOSS'-(Same Old Safety Stuff). They would rather continue doing what's politically safe than stand tall in their convictions, confront their organizations, expose real problems and advocate (no, demand) real change... as that would mean jeopardizing their salaries, and moving out of their personal comfort zones.

Let's rephrase their unhappy and unfortunate current reality this way: Far too many so-called practitioners are content (and allowed) to just show up at the office... or plant... or their client's place of business, do meaningless stuff, fill out a time justification record to satisfy some corporate quota system, and then leave. However, they'll be back - next day, next week, next month... same time, same place, same "bat-channel," same problems! They don't actually do much of significance, although they know how to, and could, if it ever were to become necessary. Anyone else on Earth can do their job if they look presentable, keep their mouth shut 95 percent of the time and can rattle off some antiquated theories, (i.e., Key Man, Ice-

berg', 3 E's of Safety, Dominos, etc.), and recite verbatim the titles, sections, paragraphs and verse of a handful of regulatory minimums. And, they get paid for this. So... "What the heck... only three days till the weekend."

Try this as an alternative: ROC the boat, take a career risk, dare to make a difference, do the right things and quit whining... or just quit!

Now, admittedly, we're not the richest safety professionals on the planet, but we are willing to exchange the financial temptations, creature comforts and token perks for freedom of choice, the chance to stand by our convictions, the opportunity to apply our skills, and the rewards of driving real change in organizational mindsets and processes that we know will deliver value, over time, to our business partners, clients, and ourselves, in financial, professional and human terms.

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Our recommendations to the "80-percent" identified in this recent poll are:

- Identify those clients and/or internal customers that see value in your services, and concentrate your time and energy on them. Do so, even if your boss

gets pissed... and do so even more if it gets you fired.

- Make your customers your boss, rather than the accounting department, corporate rules trolls, or the corpse that signs your paycheck (it's likely a rubber stamp anyway).

- Get results or get fired... because it's only results that count, and it's only results that will ultimately free your soul and enable you to discover the real opportunities to make a difference in this profession, in your life... and in the lives of those entrusted to your care and responsibility!

Continuing to lament: "I really enjoy my work and I try hard, but 'THEY' won't let me..." keeps you employed, and just might get you promoted, but it will never make a meaningful difference in out-

comes, or bring you real happiness. And, if it does, stop whining – you’re as much a part of the problem as “THEY” are. Go home and kick the dog! **OH**

*Larry Hansen, CSP, ARM, is principal of L2H Speaking of Safety Inc., a safety excellence facilitation company; creator/author of “The Architecture of Safety Excellence,” and author of the book, “ROC Your Organization: Fifty-two*

*Ways to Instigate Radical Organizational Change for Safety Excellence.” He resides in Syracuse, N.Y. and can be reached (when not shoveling) at (315) 383-3801, via e-mail at LLHSOS@dreamscape.com and online at www.L2Hsos.com.*

*Dan Zahlis is president of Emprise Inc, a risk management software company, and creator of “Active Agenda,” a Web-enabled automated risk management*

*data technology. Dan is a 15-year practitioner of risk and safety management, and is author of “The Hidden Agenda” and “CAUTION: Beware OSHA Statistics.” He has been fired from a number of brand-name companies, leaving each one in a far better position than he found it. Zahlis resides in Clovis, Calif. with a very patient wife, and can be reached at (559) 299-8054 or via e-mail at dzahlis@emprisesoftware.com.*

## 10 Ways to Really Make a Difference...or Get Fired in the Process!

**1. Slash the employee training budget!** Stupid people aren’t the problem! Double the management development budget. Enough said!

**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!

**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, CONGRAULATIONS! It worked.

**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. You get the gist.

**5. Eliminate “Rules Trolls” and the folly they produce.** Rules are made to address 5 percent of the people (who don’t follow them), and they alienate the other 95 percent (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’”!

**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 ex-

cuse.” Replace it with 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.

**7. Grant all employees a “no approvals required” purchase authority.** Five hundred dollars would be good, \$1,000 much better! Duct tape, and cardboard are nice accoutrements 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.

**8. De-lawyer your business.** Run an accounts payable print-out 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.

**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 goals and quantifiable activities, which are designed to produce better results, not the fortuitous chance of someone holding a card with a lucky number. BINGO!

**10. Create a goal of a 300 percent increase in your “recordable incident rate” for the next calendar year.** Don’t cause more injuries; demand more reporting! 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, target a 30 percent reduction in workers’ compensation costs during the same calendar year. You’ll beat it by a mile!