



Feature Article

Passing a Safety CAT Scan

None of us does anything so complex at the task level that it requires a department, silo, island, or smokestack. We think you get the gist.

by Larry Hansen and Dan Zahlis

In our work with companies striving to become safety excellence organizations, we've learned the biggest impediment to achieving improved performance is an inability to overcome the conventional "wiz-dumbs" of safety (wrongheaded thinking that impedes progress in the right direction) that inhibit organizational change. As organizational consultant John Drebing 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 have learned there is one additional preface to effecting sustainable change, and it is: "You will only change what you do when you are willing to change what you believe!"

To truly affect 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 affects 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 12 Critical Attitude Transitions and subsequent actions requisite to attaining safety excellence performance.

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).

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 groundskeepers 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 11 other 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 lineup, 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 longstanding bureaucracies of the organization. If your CEO fires you, *congratulations!* It worked.

CAT 4: A shift from safety positioned as a staff function to safety integrated into line management operations.

4. Restructure 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 may not all 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 smokestack. We 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 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."

CAT 6: A shift from tolerating excuses to obligating performance.

6. Eliminate, now and forever, the word "accident" from the corporate vocabulary. The term 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 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 accoutrements for the shipping dock, but far too much of them 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 among themselves to address needs of higher cost, and invite the management team to attend an ongoing lesson in teamwork.

Design meaningful programs that incentivize and reward people based on desired behavior change and achievement of activities designed to produce better results.

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 this 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 counterproductive 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 that are designed to produce better results--not the chance of someone holding a card with a lucky number.

CAT 10: A shift from measurements that drive down (reported) numbers to metrics that drive down (real) costs.

10. Set 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! 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, regardless of severity (see item 9 above). And, by the way, set a goal of a 30 percent reduction in worker's 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 it is always sub-optimizing in the workplace. People strive to achieve higher levels of performance when they want to and are motivated to do so. When they are told they have to, or else, they devote the greater part of their energy and efforts to getting even. And they generally will, without your having the slightest clue. Ever wonder why it takes the incumbent practitioner four months to locate his predecessor's work?

CAT 12: A shift from financing loss into the future to eliminating loss in the present.

12. Attack your Risk Finance Alienation Allocation System. Demand access to your company's risk finance allocation system. Challenge any and 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 among the proactive.

Alternative Courses of Action

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

- Increase the annual worker's 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.
- Lower the bar on profit margin projections. (Just spin the annual report.)

Stop trying to discipline people into high performance.

Decisions, decisions, decisions. Someone's got to make them!

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