Six Ways to Take a Successful Safety Program to the Next Level

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Paradoxically, success can be a real nemesis for the safety professional.

Picture this. You've just celebrated one year without a Lost Time Injury. You've managed to effect positive changes in the company's safety culture. Management and workers are buying into the safety program.

Then, just as you're starting to feel pretty good about how things are going, your Plant Manager approaches.

"Good job for the last two years," he says. "Now lets sit down on Monday and discuss what you're going to do next year to improve on your results."

You smile but you want to scream. Yikes! What am I going to do now??!!

Success Breeds Expectations

To answer that question, you must examine where you are and where you want to go.

So where are you? You've done all the "easy" things, such as writing a comprehensive safety program, completing the first comprehensive audit, changing the culture, etc. Now comes the hard part-proving that it wasn't a fluke. If you don't take things to the next level, you run the risk of being considered a flash in the pan, pigeon-holed in your current job with no hopes of moving up!

Would a company really do that to somebody who's had so much success? Yes. It happens all the time.

So be careful when plotting your next move. Your boss is expecting big things. And you'd better have a plan to deliver.

Meeting Expectations: Six Options

What can a safety director with a track record of success do to meet the growing expectations and help the company take a quantum leap forward? Let's look at some of the options. Remember that these options aren't mutually exclusive; they can be mixed and matched depending on your company's circumstances.

1. **Integrate with Quality**

One option is to integrate safety with ISO 90000. From the very outset, embed your safety goals and objectives into all of the ISO 9000 criteria. This will create even more reason to focus on safety in the facility.

2. **Pursue VPP Status**

The OSHA Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) offers companies the chance to become recognized safety leaders. Consider leading the effort to help your facilities qualify for VPP status. There are three levels of VPP: Star, Merit and Demonstration. Consider which, if any, make sense for your organization. And, if you do go the VPP route, you'll need the support of management and employees. Make sure that you can garner it.

3. **Audit More Deeply and More Frequently**

Do your audits in a way that drills down below the surface. You may discover that all isn't as rosy as it looks and that things are being held together with bubble-gum and baling wire. More intense auditing also enables you to attend to the crucial details that standard audits may overlook.

In addition to looking deeper, consider auditing more often (monthly rather than semi-annually) and more aggressively (e.g., by doing more random audits). Look closely at your inspection forms to assure their accuracy. Verify that corrective actions have been taken and are proving effective. Audit the Hazops to ensure that all the bases are covered, from employee participation

to pre-start-up safety reviews. Examine the changes to P&IDs to ensure that the changes were made. Then go out in the field and verify that the changes were actually done. ‘Sound like a lot of work? You bet it is. But it will definitely help achieve that quantum leap you’re after.

4. **Increase Safety Department Visibility**

What does this mean? It means YOU need to get out of your office and walk around the facility, not weekly but daily. Every day you and your staff need to be seen by as many people as possible. This may require additional staff to cover two and three shifts. Since employees don’t eat, drink and sleep safety like you do, you need to be seen to remind them to be safe.

5. **Step up Training**

One way to improve safety is to increase the training for line supervision. For example, the National Safety Council provides a course called the Safety Trained Supervisor. Getting the supervisors to know and appreciate what you do and why you do it can pay off immensely.

6. **Incorporate Environmental Issues**

Safety and environmental operations have a natural affinity and overlap, even though there are differences. Work closely with the environmental department and work the synergies. Similar to integrating with quality, environmental is driven by ISO 14000 and mesh almost seamlessly with health and safety.

Conclusion

These options are all viable ones for safety professionals trying to improve on an already successful act. Your challenge is to develop a plan that applies one or more of them effectively. Keep refining your goals and objectives so that you can take the program to the next level, achieve your professional goals and, most importantly, protect the people you work with against injury and illness.