

Breakout Room Summary Report

At our May Advisory Group (AG) meeting, ASSP CEO Jennifer McNelly joined to provide an overview of the [Corporate Listening Tour](#). After the review, AG members were asked to join one of five breakout rooms that was of most interest to them.

Each breakout room was asked the same 3 questions.

1. What are the barriers to moving from the current state to the future state in this area?
2. Based on the barriers, what do you, as a safety professional, need to do to help remove them?
3. What roles does ASSP play in helping remove these barriers?

Below is a Summary of those discussions

First of all, thank you to those who participated in our recent discussions on the future of the safety profession. Your willingness to share experiences, challenges and ideas provided valuable insight into the realities safety professionals are facing today and where opportunities exist to strengthen the profession moving forward.

Across the discussions, participants explored five important areas:

- Addressing Workforce and Talent Challenges
- Strengthening Leadership and Influence
- Turning Data into Meaningful Insights
- Using Technology Effectively and Responsibly
- Aligning Safety with Business Strategy

While each topic generated unique perspectives, several common themes emerged. Together, they paint a picture of a profession that is evolving rapidly and requiring new skills, new approaches and new ways of thinking.

The Safety Professional's Role Is Expanding

One of the clearest messages from the discussions was that safety professionals are being asked to do more than ever before. Technical expertise remains essential, but today's professionals are increasingly expected to influence leaders, navigate workforce



challenges, leverage technology, interpret data and contribute to broader business objectives.

Many participants noted that success in the future will depend not only on what safety professionals know, but also on how effectively they communicate, collaborate, influence and adapt.

Workforce Challenges Continue to Impact Organizations

Participants shared concerns about workforce shortages, attracting and retaining talent, changing employee expectations, language barriers and the ongoing challenge of building strong pipelines into safety and skilled trades careers.

There was broad recognition that these challenges affect not only organizations, but also the ability of safety professionals to build strong safety cultures and sustain performance over time.

At the same time, participants emphasized the importance of investing in training, development and knowledge transfer to help organizations prepare the next generation of workers and leaders.

Leadership and Influence Matter More Than Ever

Another recurring theme was the growing importance of leadership skills. Participants described a need for safety professionals to move beyond traditional compliance-focused approaches and become trusted advisors, coaches and influencers within their organizations.

Many highlighted the importance of:

- Building relationships and trust
- Communicating effectively with executives and business leaders
- Developing future leaders
- Creating cultures where safety is viewed as a shared responsibility rather than a standalone function

Participants also noted that influencing change often requires strong communication and collaboration skills in addition to technical expertise.



Data and Technology Offer Opportunity - But Also New Challenges

Participants acknowledged that data, analytics, artificial intelligence, and emerging technologies are transforming the profession. However, many also expressed concern about keeping pace with change and ensuring these tools are used effectively.

Several discussions focused on the need to:

- Better understand the quality and reliability of data
- Interpret information correctly rather than simply collect it
- Use technology to support decision-making, not replace professional judgment
- Build confidence in evaluating AI-generated outputs and recommendations

A common theme was that technology is most valuable when paired with critical thinking, practical experience and sound professional judgment.

Connecting Safety to Business Strategy Remains a Challenge

Many participants discussed the difficulty of positioning safety as a strategic business contributor rather than solely a compliance function.

Participants emphasized the importance of helping organizational leaders understand how safety contributes to:

- Operational performance
- Workforce engagement and retention
- Risk management
- Organizational resilience
- Long-term business success

There was strong interest in helping safety professionals better communicate the value of safety in ways that resonate with executives and decision-makers.

What This Means for the Profession

Taken together, the feedback suggests that the future safety professional will need a broader set of capabilities than ever before.

In addition to technical knowledge, success will increasingly require:

- Leadership and influence skills



- Business acumen
- Data literacy
- Technology awareness
- Strategic thinking
- Strong communication and relationship-building abilities

The conversations reinforced that safety professionals are uniquely positioned to help organizations navigate change - but they must also continue evolving alongside the workplaces they serve.

Looking Ahead

The insights provided valuable perspective on the challenges and opportunities facing the profession. They will help inform ongoing conversations about how safety professionals can be better supported and how organizations like ASSP can continue delivering meaningful value to members and the profession as a whole.

Most importantly, your feedback highlighted the passion, expertise and commitment that safety professionals bring to their work every day. While there are challenges ahead, the discussions also reflected optimism about the profession's ability to adapt, lead and continue making workplaces safer and healthier around the world.

