PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE FOR SAFETY SUCCESS, PART 3
How to Inspire Self-Motivation & Empowerment

E. Scott Geller and Krista S. Geller

The achievement and maintenance of an injury-free workplace requires relevant safety engagement from everyone. Workers must be self-motivated and feel empowered to look out continually on behalf of the safety and health of others.

This includes the application of the interventions discussed in the first two parts of this three-part article series: proactive analysis of close calls and minor injuries, and interpersonal behavior-based coaching that reflects active caring.

Of course, managers and supervisors must do the same, but they also need to facilitate self-motivation and perceptions of empowerment among employees. How can they do this? Psychological science offers evidence-based answers to this critical question. First, this article addresses the issue of self-motivation and explains the psychological definition of empowerment. Then connections between self-motivation and empowerment are specified, including similarities and differences between these crucial psychological dynamics.

The authors hope the research-based principles explained and illustrated here will inform and inspire readers to discuss these safety and life lessons with colleagues to customize related applications for self-motivation and for leading others to achieve and maintain a brother's/sister's keeper culture, which is essential for achieving and maintaining an injury-free workplace.

Leadership & Self-Motivation

Managing people is not the same as leading people, but both management and leadership are essential for cultivating an actively caring injury-free work culture. Simply put, managers hold people accountable to perform desirable (e.g., safe) behavior and avoid performing undesirable (e.g., at-risk) behavior for OSH. They manage or motivate behavior with an external or extrinsic accountability intervention or system. In contrast, leaders inspire self-motivation by influencing particular person-states (e.g., perceptions, attitudes, emotions) that facilitate self-motivation.

Self-motivation or self-direction often leads to discretionary behavior: more desirable behavior than requested or required. Certainly, safety managers can be safety leaders. While managers hold an assigned position that enables them to control certain motivating contingencies or behavioral consequences, anyone, regardless of position in an organization, can be a leader by promoting self-motivation in themselves and others (Geller, 2016). Psychological science provides evidence-based strategies to make this happen by increasing perceptions of choice, competence and community.

Perceived Choice

At times, people need external activators (e.g., incentives, disincentives) and consequences (e.g., rewards, penalties) to keep them motivated. But sometimes people develop self-motivation and
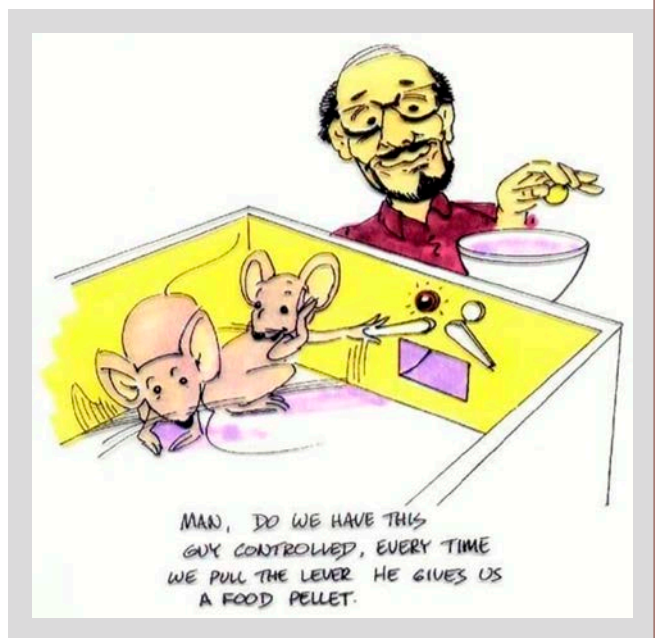
PERCEIVED CONTROL OR CHOICE IS IN THE EYES OF THE BEHOLDER

POSITIVE RECOGNITION BUILDS COMPETENCE

self-accountability within the context of an extrinsic accountability system. This person-state includes the perception of choice, as reflected in Figure 1. In fact, people have a need for autonomy, regardless of dispositional and situational factors (Deci, 1975; Deci & Flaste, 1995).

Participative management means employees have personal choice during the planning, execution and evaluation of their jobs. In the workplace, managers often tell people what to do to be most efficient. It takes more time to involve people in the decision-making process, and to promote perceptions of choice and inspire self-motivation. Consider, for example, how the language from a supervisor can influence a perception of external control or personal choice. Should managers give mandates or set expectations? Should they demand compliance or ask for commitment? Is safety a priority and a condition of employment, or a value and a personal mission to actively care for the safety and health of others?

Employees are often viewed as passive followers of safety rules and regulations because managers plan and evaluate most aspects of the job, including the safety protocol. As a result, the wage worker's perception of choice can be limited. Yet, an injury-free workplace requires interdependent engagement, information gathering and coaching by line workers,

This article addresses the issue of self-motivation and explains the psychological definition of empowerment. Then connections between self-motivation and empowerment are specified, including similarities and differences between these crucial psychological dynamics.

the employees who know most about the hazards and at-risk behaviors, as well as the factors contributing to these potential determinants of injuries and fatalities.

Perceived Competence

"People are not successful because they are motivated; they are motivated because they are successful" (Chance, 2008, p. 95). This provocative quotation reflects the powerful role of perceived competence in motivating people to continue working diligently and safely on a task when no one is watching them or holding them ac-

countable. Much research has shown that people become more self-motivated and self-directed when they feel competent at performing worthwhile work (Deci, 1975; Deci & Flaste, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Offering genuine praise, recognition or supportive feedback can make that happen, as discussed in the second article of this series (*PSJ*, Oct. 2019, pp. 28-30). Unfortunately, our culture seems to downplay the value of praise for competent work, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Just the language we use when talking to ourselves (i.e., self-talk) and to others can impact perceptions of choice and competence. For example, which of the following pairs of words or phrases connect more to the perception of choice or competence and, hence, to self-motivation?

• *occupant restraint* or *vehicle safety belt*;
• *requirement* or *opportunity*;
• *peer pressure* or *peer support*;
• *training* or *mentoring*;
• *compliance* or *accomplishment*;
• *I must meet this deadline* or *I choose to achieve another milestone*.
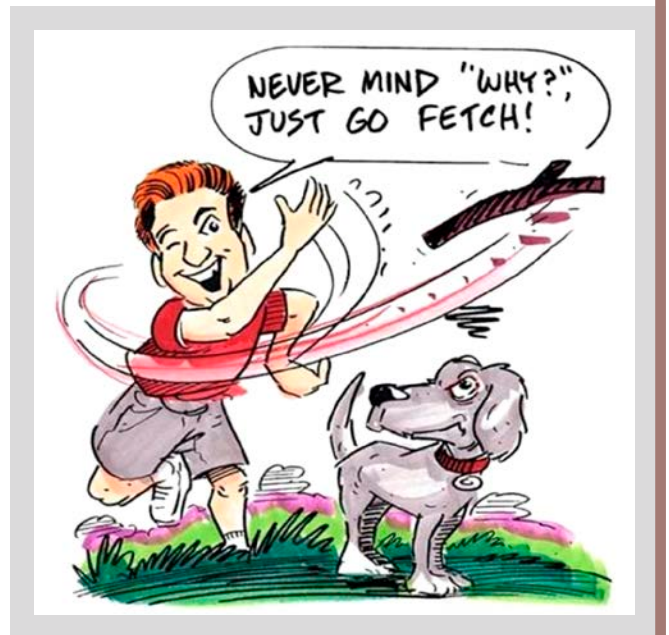
Interdependence or a Sense of Community

Deci and Flaste (1995) affirm that we have three basic psychological needs, and when these needs are satisfied, we are self-motivated. Specifically, self-motivation is activated by conditions that

FIGURE 3
CHILDREN NEED TO LEARN THE POWER OF INTERDEPENDENCE

FIGURE 4
TOP-DOWN CONTROL CAN STIFLE EMPOWERMENT

facilitate the fulfillment of our need for autonomy or choice, competence and relatedness: a sense of community or interdependence.

Consider these popular slogans in American culture: "Nice guys finish last," "You've got to toot your own horn" and "The squeaky wheel gets the grease." Now, consider these expressions, popular in Japan: "One does not make the wind, but is blown by it" and "The nail that rises above the board invites a hammering down." These expressions reflect an independent (individualistic) or an interdependent (collectivistic) mind-set or perspective.

When coming into the world, people depend on others to take care of them. Children depend on parents or caregivers for all their basic needs. In contrast, adolescents look for opportunities to be on their own. In fact, it seems that a primary mission of most teenagers is to resist dependency and become independent. As depicted in Figure 3 (p. 61), this reliance on self (independence) rather than on others (interdependence) is promoted and supported throughout U.S. culture, from high school and college classrooms to corporate boardrooms.

However, high-performance teamwork requires a reciprocal dependency: team members depending on each other to complete their task assignments. This reflects a shift from independence to interdependence and a sense of community.

With an interdependent community spirit, people trust others to look out for their safety; with self-motivation, individuals choose to contribute their competence for the safety and health of others in their work culture.

Empowerment

In the management literature, empowerment typically refers to delegating authority or responsibility, or to sharing decision-making. In other words, when managers say, "I empower you," they usually mean "Get it done." As reflected in Figure 4 (p. 61), the message is, "Make it happen, no questions asked." In contrast, the actively caring safety leader first assesses whether the empowered individual feels empowered. A proper assessment of feeling empowered involves asking three questions, as derived from social learning theory (Bandura, 1982).

The first question is, "Can I do it?" Do I have the knowledge, skills, ability and resources to achieve a particular objective? A yes answer to this first em-

powerment question reflects a personal belief in having the competence to make it happen. Bandura (1982) calls this self-efficacy. Note that the term *self-efficacy* places the focus on personal belief. An observer might think an individual has the competence to complete a task, but the empowered individual might feel differently. Thus, a yes answer to the first empowerment question implies a belief among those who received the assignment that they have the relevant personal competence to achieve the process or outcome goal.

> Although goal-setting and empowerment precede the occurrence of behavior, each reflects the impact of motivational consequences. More specifically, feeling empowered means the individual has answered yes to the motivational question, "Is it worth it?" and is activated to work toward achieving a given goal.

The second question, "Will it work?" reflects response-efficacy. Does the recipient of an assignment believe that performing the required behaviors will contribute to a valued mission for the performer and for others? In this case, education about the mission-based value of performing the task-relevant behavior may be needed. With regard to behavior-based safety, the response-efficacy question translates to believing that a behavioral coaching process will eventually contribute to injury prevention and help to cultivate a brother's/sister's keeper work culture.

A negative answer to the self-efficacy question indicates a need for more training, whereas a negative answer to the response-efficacy question implies a need for education. In other words, people might believe they are able to accomplish a particular process or task (i.e., self-ef-

ficacy), but might not believe such accomplishment will make a difference in a desired outcome (i.e., response-efficacy). In this case, education is needed, including an explanation of an evidence-based principle or theory and perhaps the presentation of convincing data. Regarding the behavioral-coaching process, substantial data are available to show that a behavioral-observation-and-feedback process prevents workplace injuries (Geller, Perdue & French, 2004; Sulzer-Azaroff & Austin, 2000).

The third question, "Is it worth it?" targets motivation. Is the expected outcome worth the effort? Will performing the task-relevant behaviors result in a worthwhile outcome: a positive consequence to achieve or a negative consequence to avoid? Figure 5 illustrates these three empowerment questions by referring to the three beliefs required to feel empowered: self-efficacy, response-efficacy and outcome-expectancy.

After answering yes to these three empowerment questions, meaningful behavior-focused goals must be set. To make goal setting empowering, the authors propose the following SMARTS acronym:
- S for specific;
- M for motivational;
- A for attainable;
- R for relevant;
- T for trackable;
- S for shared.

The last S is added because sharing a behavioral goal with others enlists social support that can activate behavior and behavioral feedback to facilitate goal attainment.

SMARTS goals are empowering because they are attainable ("I can do it"), motivational ("It's worth it"), and relevant ("It will work").

Empowerment vs. Self-Motivation

Although goal-setting and empowerment precede the occurrence of behavior, each reflects the impact of motivational consequences. More specifically, feeling empowered means the individual has answered yes to the motivational question, "Is it worth it?" and is activated to work toward achieving a given goal. If the goal setting was SMARTS, consequences are implicated by the M for motivational. In other words, feeling empowered implies that the individual is ready or activated to work toward achieving a specified goal, which reflects the potential achievement of a particular consequence. Similarly, a self-motivated individual

FIGURE 5
THE THREE BELIEFS THAT DETERMINE EMPOWERMENT

FIGURE 6
EMPOWERMENT & GOAL SETTING MOTIVATE WITH CONSEQUENCES
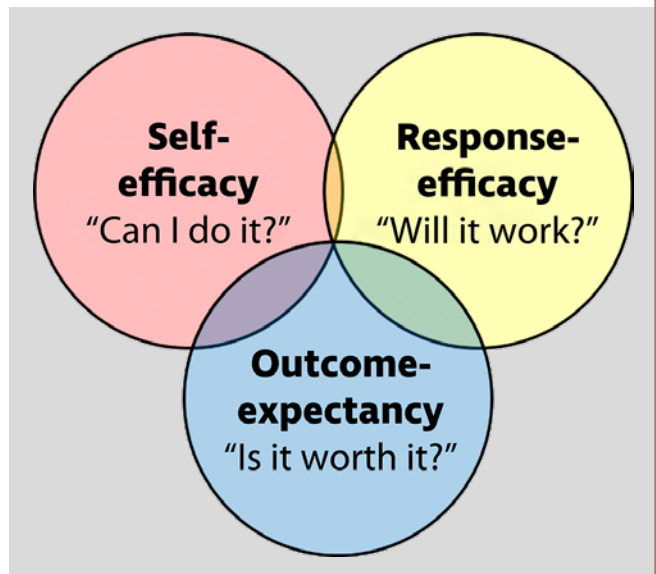
is anticipating or has received a consequence (e.g., recognition or supportive feedback) that supports self-directed rather than other-directed behavior.

Figure 6 illustrates how empowerment, vision and goal setting fit with the activator-behavior-consequence model of applied behavioral science. The simple but fundamental point is that people need to feel empowered to work for goal achievement, including the anticipated acquisition of a desirable consequence or the expectation to avoid an undesirable consequence.

People must believe in and own the vision. They need to feel support from peers to attain process goals that support the vision by receiving supportive and corrective feedback to increase the quantity and improve the quality of behaviors consistent with vision-relevant goals. Note that behavioral consequences are crucial. Empowerment and goal setting can activate the occurrence of desirable behavior, but without relevant supportive consequences, the behavior will not last. It will extinguish.

Conclusion

This third article of our three-part series introduces evidence-based techniques for motivating people to implement the safety-improvement processes explicated in the first two articles of this series: implementing effective behavior-improvement coaching and analyzing incidents proactively for leading indicators to prevent injuries. The safety success of these critical safety-success processes increases as a function of the number of employees engaged in accomplishing them. People are more likely to initiate and sustain focused contribution to a process when they are self-motivated

and feel empowered. Self-motivation increases when people perceive a sufficient degree of choice, competence and community with regard to a particular safety-improvement procedure.

People feel empowered to contribute to an injury-prevention intervention when they perceive self-efficacy ("I can do it"), response-efficacy ("It will work") and anticipate a beneficial outcome ("It's worth it"). Plus, behavioral goals are empowering when they are challenging but attainable, relevant to achieving a worthwhile mission and are expected to result in desirable consequences. While self-motivation, empowerment and goal setting precede the performance of relevant behavior, each of these human dynamics includes an expectation of a desirable consequence and therefore activates motivation to perform. **PSJ**
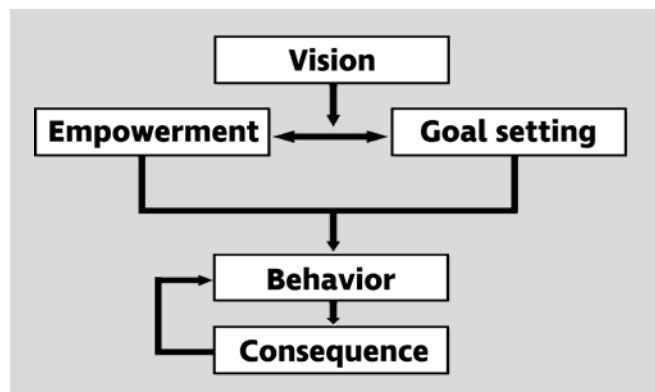
References

Bandura, A. (1982). Self-efficacy mechanism in human agency. *American Psychologist, 37*(2), 122-147.

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control.* New York, NY: W.H. Freeman and Co.

Chance, P. (2008). *The teacher's craft: The 10 essential skills of effective teaching.* Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

Deci, E.L. (1975). *Intrinsic motivation.* New York, NY: Plenum.

Deci, E.L. & Flaste, R. (1995). *Why we do what we do: Understanding self-motivation.* New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Deci, E.L. & Ryan, R.M. (1995). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determinism in human behavior.* New York, NY: Plenum.

Geller, E.S. (2013, Dec. 5). The psychology of self-motivation (Video). TEDx VirginiaTech. Retrieved from https://youtu.be/7sxpKhIbr0E

Geller, E.S. (2016). The psychology of self-motivation. In E.S. Geller (Ed.). *Applied psychology: Actively caring for people* (pp. 83-118). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Geller, E.S., Perdue, S. & French, A. (2004, July). Behavior-based safety coaching: 10 guidelines for successful application. *Professional Safety, 49*(7), 42-49.

Reed, D., Yanagita, B.T., Becirevic, A., et al. (2016). Actively caring for higher education. In E.S. Geller (Ed.). *Applied psychology: Actively caring for people* (pp. 563-593). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Ryan, R.M. & Deci, E.L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the foundation of intrinsic motivation, social development and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 68-78.

Sulzer-Azaroff, B. & Austin, J. (2000, July). Does BBS work? Behavior-based safety and injury reduction: A survey of the evidence. *Professional Safety, 45*(7), 19-24.

E. Scott Geller, Ph.D., alumni distinguished professor and director of the Center for Applied Behavior Systems at Virginia Tech for 50 years, is also senior partner of Safety Performance Solutions and cofounder of GellerAC4P Inc. (www.gellerac4p.com). He has authored more than 300 research articles, 40 books and 75 book chapters addressing the application of psychological science to improve human welfare and life satisfaction on a large scale. Geller and his daughter, Krista Geller, coauthored *Actively Caring for People's Safety: How to Cultivate a Brother's/Sister's Keeper Work Culture.* Geller is a professional member of ASSP's Star Valley Chapter.

Krista S. Geller, Ph.D., became the people-based safety global teacher, coach and consultant for Bechtel in 2012, whereby she helped employees develop the competence and courage to actively care for the safety of themselves and coworkers. She traveled worldwide to assist in customizing the people-based safety process for diverse cultures and work processes. Her mission is to inspire people to actively care for the safety of themselves and others. This mission inspired her to develop and become president of the consulting and training organization Geller AC4P Inc.