How to Grow Your Safety Program
FROM GOOD TO ELITE
By Mark Steinhofer

Every organization is capable of implementing an elite safety culture with the right perspective and components in place. Going from good to elite is like the difference between a burger from a fast-food chain and one made with fresh ingredients that you grill at home for family and friends.

The quick, easy burger provides the expected meat, bun and toppings. You are likely not invested in the burger's quality beyond that it meets the current need: It alleviates your hunger fast.

When making a burger at home, you generally care more about the quality of the food you serve to family and friends. You choose fresh toppings and serve the burger while proudly wearing an apron emblazoned with a cooking pun and using your special spatula. You are invested in this burger and hope it provides a delicious experience for your guests.

Like the fast-food burger, a good safety program gets the basic job done. You likely did not implement it yourself but paid a safety company to plan and enforce it in your organization. It is a checkbox, not a culture.

However, you are invested in an elite safety program like the burger you make and serve to family. You invest care and planning into an elite safety program, which you have created specifically for your organization alongside safety experts. It is not a set-it-and-forget-it program, either. It is monitored and updated frequently to ensure that it continues to keep employees safe.

Several key factors are needed to transform a company's safety culture and ultimately create a safer workplace (Figure 1):
- human choice
- a defined safety system
- motivation of the organization and individuals

These components do not operate in silos and the success and effectiveness of the safety culture depend on how they work together. An individual may make the correct choice when it comes to a safety protocol, but if it is a one-off decision and another individual does not
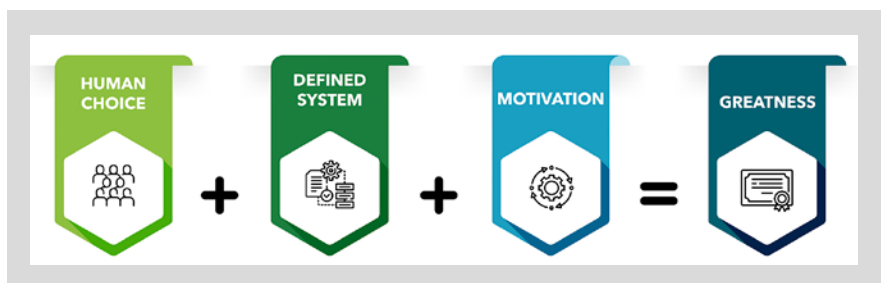
FIGURE 1
TRANSFORMING A SAFETY CULTURE

HUMAN CHOICE + DEFINED SYSTEM + MOTIVATION = GREATNESS

FIGURE 2
KEY ELEMENTS OF AN ELITE SAFETY CULTURE

FUEL — Be the Best | IGNITION — Courage | ATMOSPHERE — Motivation

make the same choice because it is not part of a designed system, then the program has failed.

The Psychology of Choice

How many choices have you already made today? No doubt if we were to compare the options of coffee versus tea, blue versus yellow, or even left versus right, chances are we would answer differently some of the time. However, if asked whether we prefer being injured or not being injured, we would collectively agree that not being injured is the better choice. Through our agreement, we are

now on the path from good toward elite safety expectations.

We make choices based on the information available at the time and the expectations that are understood about a certain situation. Our motivation to make decisions can vary widely, but generally, our choices come down to a need that we seek to satisfy (e.g., will tea cut it this morning or is it more of a coffee type of day?).

Many choices are made subconsciously and without much thought, which makes it imperative for safety protocols to be ingrained into an organization's culture. Safety programs that are thought out, planned for and communicated require making fewer choices when a safety issue arises. Taking time to make a choice can lead to the wrong decision or wasted time when time is of the essence.

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Defined Safety System

A defined safety system approach identifies the safety building blocks necessary in an elite safety culture. The purpose is to identify the structures, systems and components needed to prevent, control or mitigate negative outcomes resulting from the identified hazards. The stronger the defined safety system, the easier the road to achieving elite safety as a core value.

The elements needed to build a fire provide the framework for an elite defined safety system. The essential components to build a fire are fuel (materials), oxygen (atmosphere) and heat (ignition source). In a defined safety system, the fuel is the desire to learn and become the best in safety practices. The ignition is the courage to care and the drive to take it to the next level. The atmosphere is the strength to overcome obstacles and the motivation to create and maintain a successful safety program.

An elite safety culture can only exist if all three areas—fuel (be the best), ignition (courage) and atmosphere (motivation)—work together (Figure 2, p. 29). These components must be continually managed and maintained. If one necessary element of a fire is lost, the fire goes out. However, if continually tended to, the fire can provide ongoing heat; a company can maintain a long-lasting, highly successful safety culture.

Motivation

As the saying goes, "If it is important to you, you will find a way. If not, you will find an excuse." The same concept applies to partnering contract firms and individuals in the field. Not only must safety be a core value, the organization must also embody three motivating principles:

1. All must strive for safety perfection.
2. Collectively, an organization must be preoccupied with the possibility of failure and how failure impacts individuals and the organization.

3. It must be proactive versus reactive, relying on leading indicators versus lagging indicators. Like a car's front windshield and rearview mirror, a safety culture must have a view of the past but a wider focus on the future.

Conclusion

An elite safety culture is comprised of three must-have elements: human choice, a defined system and motivation. The good news is this formula is possible within all organizations. All organizations can go from a good to an elite safety culture. **PSJ**
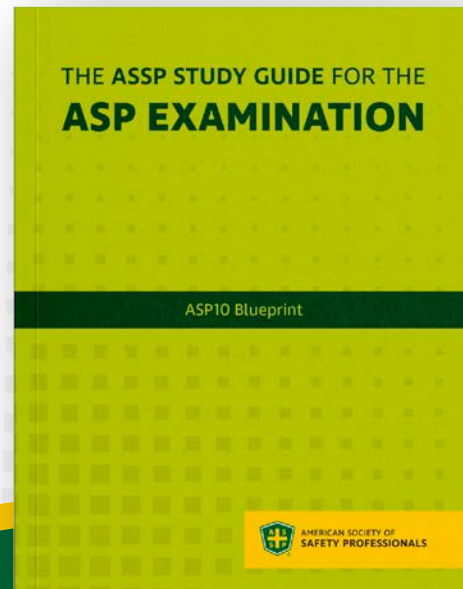
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