

# ECI Briefing Note: Leadership and Motivation in Safety, Health and Environment



**Leadership and Motivation  
in  
Safety, Health & Environment**

*September 2009*

## Leadership and Motivation in Safety, Health & Environment

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### Introduction

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“It is the duty of every man to protect himself and those associated with him from accidents which may result in injury or death.”

*Abraham Lincoln*

Leadership is leadership. The spin off for achieving excellence in SHE (Safety, Health and Environment) is that other parameters such as production and quality are invariably improved. Think about your first impression of any site or workplace that is tidy, well organised and visibly being planned. It is also safe, healthy, does not harm the environment and is ultimately profitable – the management approach on the profitable element of business is always visible to the workers by their individual and organisational approach or behaviours towards SHE.

"The day workers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help them or concluded that you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership and a step which leads to an accident."

*Colin Powell, Then USA Secretary of State*

Many organisations now recognise the need for leadership programmes or models and it makes sense for these to have SHE issues at their heart. Doing this has positive effects in functional and cultural areas of the business, for example how an individual feels about an organisation and their part in it, or how a community looks upon their corporate neighbour.

**You** are a SHE leader regardless of whether you are leading a team of designers, engineers or constructors or the CEO of an organisation – your perspective, perceptions and environment will be different, whether task oriented or more strategic, but the SHE goals will be the same.

This note should be used in conjunction with the Safety Health & Environment (SHE) Management Guide available from ECI. The aim is that it can be used by all levels of management, supervision or individuals in an organisational context, or on an individual project. It covers how leaders can look at themselves and develop their skills and behaviours with the aim of becoming better SHE leaders.

You may not know every technical SHE hazard or defect, but your behaviour, how you act and how you are perceived, is where you can have a huge impact. 'Walking the talk' is a much over used phrase but is none the less true, but also your commitment to the organisational SHE objectives and criteria is key. This is always tested most when conflicts between delivery or production and SHE issues come to the fore.

## **What is effective SHE leadership?**

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Leadership is all about bringing out the best in yourself as well as the people around you. When it comes to SHE, leadership has to do with first holding yourself accountable before you look to others. Through your actions, new leaders and SHE champions are encouraged to come forward to help achieve SHE goals. Again SHE is a shared leadership responsibility that no one person can achieve working on their own. Effective leaders communicate well, encourage positive behaviour, recognise achievements, develop people, inspire action, and most of all set an example for others to follow.

It is important to describe important elements that make up and influence an individual's approach or attitude to leadership.

SHE leadership requires a combination of:

- establishing effective organisational SHE culture
- ensuring continual improvement
- influencing human behaviour

“The truest indicator of management’s ability to manage is their ability to manage SHE.”

*Les McCraw, Former CEO Fluor Corporation*

### **Establishing an effective organisational SHE culture**

The cultural maturity of an organisation can be assessed by how individuals at all levels consider or prioritise SHE. In mature organisations, decisions and actions are based on this priority and they follow up to verify that SHE concerns receive appropriate attention. The work environment, attitudes and behaviours of individuals, and policies and procedures foster such a SHE culture.

SHE culture, of a project or an organisation, can be summarised as how all individuals, and in particular, all managers at all levels contribute to the SHE approach of the work environment.

A SHE culture is a behavioral climate within a company that promotes, rewards, and controls SHE in such a way as to make SHE a part of business instead of a condition of business.

### **Ensuring continual improvement**

“It always amazes me the people that do the same thing and expect different results”

*Albert Einstein*

Continual improvement is typified by individuals and organisations where even very good performance is not accepted as ‘good enough’.

Individuals at all levels of the organisation take personal responsibility for the improvement in the quality of their own work and recognise that excellent work provides the basis for SHE as well as process and product. Their decisions and actions are based on this.

The work environment, the attitudes and behaviours of individuals, and the policies and procedures foster such an improvement culture.

A culture of continual improvement is summarised as:-

- Everyone in the organisation contributes to the continual improvement culture of the work environment through their behaviour.
- Line Managers and Supervisors are responsible for, and held accountable for the continual improvement of work performed within their area of responsibility.
- Work practice norms in the organisation promote the improvement culture through the provision of clear standards and expectations and follow up.

### **Influencing human behaviour**

Unless people actually do the right things, the end result will not change, even if the right organisational factors are in place – human performance of everyone involved is an essential part of the picture

Good human performance can be summarised as:

- everyone taking responsibility for their actions and being committed to improve SHE performance.
- managers establishing conditions that support excellence in SHE.
- Leader behaviours promoting excellence in human performance and supporting safe and reliable work.

## **How do you become a better SHE Leader?**

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“Becoming an authentic leader is not easy. First you have to understand yourself, because the hardest person you will have to lead is yourself. Once you have an understanding of your authentic self, you will find that leading others is much easier.”

*Bill George, Harvard Professor and former CEO of Medtronic*

The following nine broad behaviours are considered essential to the development of a positive safety culture (Biggs et al)<sup>1</sup>:

1. Communicate company values
2. Demonstrate leadership
3. Clarify required and expected behaviour
4. Personalise SHE outcomes
5. Develop positive SHE attitudes
6. Engage and own SHE responsibilities and accountabilities
7. Increase hazard/risk awareness and preventive behaviours
8. Improve understanding and effective implementation of SHE management systems
9. Monitor, review and reflect on personal effectiveness.

### **1. Communicate company values**

Relate behaviours, decisions and attitudes that are expected, supported and valued by the company.

“The task of a leader is to get his people from where they are to where they have not been.”

*Henry Kissinger*

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *A Practical guide to Safety Leadership*, by Herbert C Biggs, Donald P Dingsdag and Colette R Roos, 2008, ISBN 978-1-74107-156-6

*For example:*

- *Discuss SHE issues at high-level meetings to help to raise the profile of SHE. Raising an organisation's SHE profile assists in shifting perceptions of workplace health and safety from 'regulatory compliance' to 'strategic management' and concern for the welfare of all.*
- *Provide updates to your management group on emerging SHE initiatives relevant to your business.*
- *Make your company values explicit on SHE – If they are implied it makes it difficult for everyone to be clear about what is important to the organisation.*

## **2. Demonstrate leadership**

Act to motivate and inspire others to work towards achieving a particular goal or outcome by sending clear and consistent messages about the importance of SHE which must extend beyond satisfying minimum regulatory requirements.

*"Anyone can hold the helm when the sea is calm"*

*Publilius Syrus ~ 100 BC*

*For example:*

- *Engage company leaders in playing an active role in SHE whether it is communicating the SHE message, visiting sites to observe SHE behaviour, singling out and recognising an individual's "safe" behaviour, or making sure that adequate resources are available to support the desired SHE goals.*
- *Build into the management culture of the organisation the understanding that all managers are responsible for the SHE management of the people reporting to them.*
- *Concentrate on what you can do not what you can't.*
- *Take time to attend executive functions, seminars and conferences on SHE.*
- *Practice the "talk, walk and do" SHE model.*

*"Example is leadership"*

*Albert Scheitzer*



### **Talk Safety – Walk Safety – Do Safety<sup>2</sup>**

SHE leaders know they have to continually address people about SHE issues and are prepared in advance to do so. Make sure you have a consistent, positive message at hand.

In your personal message or speech make sure *talking* SHE is on your mind and can be communicated consistently and positively to other team members even at short notice.

It is easy to turn a blind eye when you see unsafe conditions or actions. Perhaps you have other things on your mind, are tired of asking or simply want to avoid a difficult employee. When you *walk* safety, you have to do it through your actions. Every time you turn a blind eye and allow something you shouldn't, you lose your focus of serving others and expose team members to potentially serious injuries.

A lack of SHE leadership and an unwillingness to serve others can lead to avoidable incidents. *Walking* safety every chance you get could make the difference between an injured worker and an employee returning home safe and healthy.

Plan ahead and know how you are going to integrate SHE into your daily routine. Maybe set time aside every morning and start each meeting with SHE or make a commitment to not turn a blind eye. Whatever your plan, develop it now and find a way to integrate SHE regularly into your daily routine. Keep it simple and start out slowly so it is an easy transition.

Making SHE easy and creating value in being a SHE leader are critical steps in successfully *doing* SHE. Often, the actions employees take go unnoticed, leaving many to feel unappreciated for the contributions they make. Building positive relationships, saying thank you and showing appreciation can promote safe, healthy and environmentally responsible behaviours and help ensure employees feel valued.

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Joe Tavenner, 2007, [josephravenner@yahoo.com](mailto:josephravenner@yahoo.com), in [http://ehstoday.com/safety/ehs\\_imp\\_77288/](http://ehstoday.com/safety/ehs_imp_77288/), accessed 23/09/09

### 3. Clarify required and expected behaviours

Clarify the specific behaviours required and expected of those for whom you are responsible.

*For example:*

- *Establish performance benchmarks at organisational or business unit level.*
- *Develop a strategy to address the information and training needs of the everyone in the organisation.*
- *Include information about management's role and responsibilities in SHE induction training and management development programs.*
- *Use the organisation's intranet or screen savers to reinforce key messages about the role and responsibility of managers in SHE.*
- *Consider using collective or individual workplace agreements, performance development frameworks and job descriptions to improve management's accountability for SHE management.*

#### **Zero Tolerance of Unsafe Behaviour**

When it comes to SHE, a line in the sand has to be drawn on what you expect and what you are willing to tolerate. To truly achieve zero incidents and injuries, there is no middle ground. You are either behaving safely or you are not. Accepting or turning a blind eye to unsafe behaviour only perpetuates an unsafe workplace. Removing unsafe workers from a jobsite is a powerful way to get your message across that you are serious when it comes to SHE. All it takes is one unsafe act to cause a fatality.

Ensuring you have process to establish why unsafe acts are being triggered and taking mitigation on root causes, including appropriate disciplinary actions is far more powerful than just releasing a worker that committed an unsafe acts. However there is a fine balance to “not let the cowboys get away with it” and to protect the others.

#### 4. Personalise SHE outcomes

Make SHE issues more obvious, relevant and emotional for the individual to personalise their role in preventing and eliminating risks and hazards.

*For example:*

- *Take the initiative to personally communicate serious accident details to families of injured workers*
- *Use payslips to send consistent short messages*
- *Use people's personal experiences (good or bad) to prompt discussion about SHE.*

#### **Reward and Recognition of Safe Practices**

Basic psychology teaches that people behave in line with how they are rewarded and recognised. Another words, we get the behaviour that we reward and recognise. It is a good idea to celebrate company-wide SHE achievements and recognise an entire construction team for safe behaviour. However, it is just as important to seek out and recognise individual SHE performers who help make a difference to the overall site. This might include recognition for an experienced worker who takes a new person under their wing to coach them on SHE. Or it might include a project manager who walked the jobsite with a supervisor and took the time to praise one or more workers for safe behaviour.

Some personal questions for you...

- What practical actions (enabling arrangements) do you take to demonstrate management commitment?
- How do you challenge the perception that schedule/ time and/or cost are more important than SHE?
- How do you influence your Contractors/Subcontractors?
- Just before an important meeting you walk into an area with four or five people working in it. The area is congested with material waiting to be installed. What do you do?

## 5. Develop positive SHE attitudes

Foster the development of attitudes and beliefs that support safe, healthy and environmentally responsible behaviour in both individuals and teams.

*For example:*

- *Develop everyone into SHE leaders.*
- *Foster an action-based SHE culture while pushing responsibility for SHE down into an organisation creating a team-based approach that results in superior performance.*
- *Find out what motivates the individuals in your team and design a motivation programme based on those needs.*
- *Think of yourself as a coach of a team, not the boss of a department. Motivation through leadership by example is the key to success.*
- *Get your workers to motivate the people around them and create an air of social acceptance through following the rules.*
- *Recognise that cultural and attitudinal change may be necessary to improve performance – and that this takes time.*
- *Try explaining to your team the effects of an incident on your own life.*

## 6. Engage and own SHE responsibilities and accountabilities

Increase input, actions and involvement in the SHE management process by individuals

### **Personal carbon footprint**

A Senior manager who, concerned about his personal carbon footprint, took extra time off work to travel to a European meeting by train rather than plane.

*For example*

- *Start meetings made up of several teams or departments with a ‘SHE moment’. Typically, this is done by a volunteer, it can be a safety, health or environmental issue, and it can be work or personal. It can be a powerful ice breaker, it can show fellow workers that all are at risk and no one is infallible! It sets the scene and leads the meeting.*

## **7. Increase hazard / risk awareness and preventive behaviours**

Increase the individual's (site and office based) understanding of the SHE outcomes associated with their decisions, behaviours and actions.

SHE knowledge is important for field personnel and everyone else in the company. Project managers, project engineers and even the managing director or CEO of a company who visits a site need SHE education in order to properly model and encourage safe behaviour.

*For example:*

- *Seek professional expertise where needed to diagnose or address areas of risk.*
- *Find new ways of bringing SHE education to jobsites - minimise a lecture approach in favour of “learning by doing” since this is preferred by most adults.*
- *Integrate SHE education into daily interactions with workers.*

## **8. Improve understanding and effective implementation of SHE management systems**

Enable individuals to increase their knowledge of specific ways in which hazards are managed, as well as their ability to apply and implement the actual SHE processes.

*For example:*

- *Make sure your management system is not full of complex and wordy documents.*
- *Help understanding by summarising key elements by flow diagrams or other visual methods.*
- *Encourage assessments from other parts of your organisation as well as external bodies – learn from the feedback.*
- *Use a recent accident as a catalyst to review how the organisation responded to the event.*
- *Make 'lessons learned' available throughout the organisation.*
- *Develop a 'key SHE messages' booklet to summarise the important steps in an assessment or process – this will complement your education programme.*

## **9. Monitor, review and reflect on personal effectiveness**

Frequently use various sources of information to gain feedback on the effectiveness of culture actions and other SHE-related behaviours.

*For example:*

- *Include in your appraisal or 360<sup>o</sup> feedback process SHE assessments as part of the normal review process*
- *Adopt SHE targets that are aligned to, or exceed, those set by international organisations are benchmarks that can be adopted by senior management.*
- *Report organisational SHE performance in your Annual reports.*
- *Introduce financial accountabilities for SHE performance to business units.*
- *Include SHE objectives in all individuals performance assessment, appraisals or agreements, monitor them through review.*
- *Recognise good performance as well as poor performance.*

### **Measure positive SHE outcomes**

Historically, the construction industry has focused solely on the observation, reporting and documentation of “unsafe” behaviours, SHE violations and penalties. To properly assess SHE results, attention is turning to the thousands of “safe” practices going on every day at jobsites. This helps to properly contrast and compare “unsafe” practices. New methodologies are available to assist contractors in tracking leading SHE indicators to help predict and prevent unwanted events before they happen.

### **SHE goals**

- Instead of reporting performance, establish goals and measure progress against these goals.
- Set positive, quantifiable, specific goals and make everyone aware of these goals and understand the part they play individually in helping to achieve these goals.
- Consider setting a zero recordable injury rate goal at the outset of a project or at the beginning of a company’s fiscal year, and report progress against this goal.
- Consider setting a goal of working 352 days without any lost time and report lost days against this number.

## **Five Factors for effective SHE leadership<sup>3</sup>**

Effective leaders must address: expectation; communication; innovation; organisation; and appreciation.

### **Expectation**

Unspoken, unrecognised expectations can lead to job frustration, substandard SHE performance, decreased job safety commitment and even high turnover. Understand that most employees expect to have a workplace free of hazards. Workers have varying expectations when it comes to factors such as autonomy, work/life balance, career opportunities, stability, structure, and teamwork. The key is to learn what expectations the individuals in your organisation have and then work with them to meet or, in some cases, adjust those expectations.

### **Communication**

Learn everything you can about your communication style and how it affects others - what impact do you have? If you don't usually get a positive reaction from those around you, take a course in interpersonal skills.

### **Innovation**

To innovate, grow and improve an excellent SHE culture requires individuals who are able to see the big picture. Accept that change is a part of life; learn let go of the past and embrace and apply new techniques, technologies, and tools when appropriate.

### **Organisation**

Safety innovation cannot be done without teams of people dedicated to hitting the goal: A Zero-Injury Workplace. Leaders must be able to organise a team and motivate it towards the goal. Imagine everyone leading each other to the goal of a zero-injury workplace.

### **Appreciation**

Great leaders accomplish great things. Great leaders appreciate the people who make things happen. Understanding how one reacts to certain situations as a leader is vital to being a successful leader.

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Carl Potter's *Workplace Safety: Five Factors for Rigorous Safety Leadership* – [www.sideroad.com](http://www.sideroad.com) – accessed 23/09/09



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