SafetyInfo

Accountability 4-3-3

Introduction

According to industry expert Dr. Dan Petersen, safety incidents are the result of organizational culture. Culture is heavily influenced by leadership behavior. "In all the research and benchmarking that has been done, it is clear that [in order to create a zero incident safety culture] primary emphasis must remain on management involvement. Management is the key." (Petersen 2001, 8)

From his extensive experience in safety culture management, Dr. Petersen discerned six criteria for safety excellence, four of which are dependent upon leadership behavior. Executive management must be visibly committed to the zero-incident culture. Middle management must be actively involved. Front-line supervision must be focused on activities that drive safe behaviors. Employees must participate in creating the elements of the safety culture that affect them. Leaders at all levels must lead by example and create a participative environment that involves employees. To create a zero incident culture, leadership behavior must be addressed.

According to world renowned author and teacher Zig Ziglar (1977), "You must inspect what you expect!" Dr. Peterson adds, "You can't get a culture of safety excellence without accountability" (Petersen 2001). The effective leader must create a culture in which everyone accepts personal ownership for his/her role and voluntarily performs it with accuracy every day. There are four steps to creating accountability (Exhibit 1), three moments of truth in which the leader's behavior is critical and three types of performers in every team the leader must be able to interact with effectively.

A Culture of Accountability

Accountability is perhaps one of the most talked about concepts in business today, yet one of the least understood. Leaders typically view it as something they must hold others to while employees see it primarily as discipline for something they did wrong. While these widely held perceptions reveal limited aspects of a strong accountability system, there's much more leaders must understand to build voluntary and accurate execution of the work to be done through others.

Accountability is accepting responsibility for and providing satisfactory explanations of one's own actions and deeds. It is the opposite of blaming others for things that go wrong. Leaders can either hold their subordinates accountability for the expected work or they can create an environment in which others take accountability for their work. When employees take accountability for their work, they do what's expected of them with a high degree of accuracy while requiring very little intervention from the leader. It requires a one-on-one relationship between leader and subordinate. Accountability 4-3-3 is the key.

Four Steps to Accountability

Creating a culture of safety accountability requires the leader to follow four steps with every direct report. These activities cannot be abdicated to others such as the human resources

department or other employees on the team. While the leader may involve others in the process, he/she must personally oversee the activities.

The Four Steps to Accountability

Step 1: Define the safety activities required for each role, from the CEO to the frontline. Everyone must clearly understand what's expected of him/her in order to create the presence of safety. It is the leader's responsibility to ensure every subordinate is clear about the work they are expected to perform.

Step 2: Train everyone on those activities to ensure they know how to do them right. It's a breach of integrity to expect good performance if you haven't provided proper training and preparation. While the leader may not personally train each subordinate on the specific activities of the role, they must oversee those activities and validate that the subordinate knows how to do the work right.

Step 3: Measure performance with periodic spot checks and conversations to ensure the activities are being performed correctly. Make sure you have the proper combination of leading and lagging indicators at each level. At the front line, measure the activities that drive safe behavior, not safety results such as accident or incident rates. For middle managers and executives, measure activities that build the presence of safety and track safety results.

Step 4: Recognize employees when they perform their safety activities correctly, and coach to improve their performance when needed. Leaders must provide timely, relevant, specific and frequent feedback to subordinates about the work they are expected to perform. Positive recognition is much more effective than correction or criticism. Most people work safety most of the time yet the majority of the communication they receive from their leader is about the unsafe work they do. This is a problem. The more you recognize the safe work your people do, the less you will have to deal with their unsafe work. Positive recognition is a very powerful tool for influencing the performance of others. When you build it into your habitual leadership behavior, others will gradually begin to self-correct the things they do wrong and the need for you to correct or discipline will decline.

Three Pivotal Moments of Truth

There are three pivotal moments of truth when the interaction between leader and subordinate is critical to the work of accountability.

1. **At the beginning** of the relationship. Discuss what's expected and how it will be measured. The goal is to gain mutual clarity on those two items. Invest whatever amount of time is necessary to reach understanding. The employee should understand what's expected and how it is measured to such a high degree that they are able to self-assess their own performance accurately. It may take a while to achieve but it's worth the effort. When the employee is able to self-assess accurately and self-correct when needed, the need for intervention from others is greatly reduced.

2. **Every day,** as you interact with one another. The two things a leader must do on a daily basis to reinforce safety activities and behaviors are noted in Step 4 above. As noted, positive recognition is much more effective in influencing behavior than criticism or correction. The effective leader must administer both, but positive reinforcement should be used at a ratio of at least 7 to 1 over correction or discipline. The specific approach to

this interaction is determined by the quality of the employee's performance as described in the next section.

3. **The periodic summary,** or performance review. Whether formal or informal, you must regularly meet to gain clarity and make adjustments. This conversation should occur about once per quarter for individual contributors and no less than once per month for leaders. It should take about an hour to complete and should focus on three primary issues – a brief review of performance during the previous period, an assessment of that performance, and look ahead into the next performance period. The employee should do most of the talking with the leader asking questions and providing support. When the relationship has matured, the employee will be largely managing their own performance while the leader gently guides, directs and coaches.

Three Types of Performers

Most of the work of accountability occurs during item 2 above. Ironically, most leaders lack this skill, especially in the area of positive recognition. Effective leaders, however, develop their skill to influence the behavior of others as they interact each day. There are three basic types of performers in any team: drivers, doers and draggers. The effective leader understands the characteristics of each and how to customize his/her influence for optimum effect.

Approximately 30 percent of a team are **drivers**, self-starters who require very little oversight or supervision. They are extremely dependable and loyal and can be relied upon to deliver consistent high quality work. They are highly competent, enabling you to present them as role models of excellence. If they possess the desire and potential to teach others, they can become mentors and trainers. They volunteer above and beyond the expectations of their role and frequently serve on continuous improvement safety teams. They are role models of team values and standards and encourage others to emulate them. They demonstrate the DNA of Trust with others. Drivers are leaders in solving problems and resolving team conflicts and aggressively initiate positive innovations to make things better. That's why they're called "drivers." They are efficient and productive, yet humble and meek. When someone praises them for the great work they do, their typical response is "I was just doing my job." Positive reinforcement and opportunities for development are what interest drivers most. When you see their great work, let them know you appreciate it. Spend time with them to learn what they do well so you can pass it on to others. You may also want to create a think tank from your driver group to help you brainstorm continuous improvements to move the team forward.

Doers possess many of the characteristics of drivers but lack the desire or capability to teach. They are positive contributors to the team who consistently do what is expected of them. They are reliable team members who prefer to do their work and be left alone. They usually do their work well, hence the name "doer." They prefer to leave confronting disrespectful behaviors in others up to the leader or the drivers. Doers comprise about 60 percent of most team rosters and are the teammates you rely on day in and day out to produce good work. They are the core of the team and extremely valuable. Since doers usually perform well, they simply need encouragement for the good work they do and light coaching to improve.

Draggers are the actively disengaged team members who make life miserable for everyone around them. Others view them as negative contributors. They may be rude, selfish, prone to gossip and frequently complaining. Sometimes, they can masquerade as highly competent in their work but, due to their disrespectful behavior, no one on the team wants to work with them. Draggers drag the team down. In a culture of accountability and safety excellence, the definition

of a great team member must include demonstrating strength in both the technical skills of the role and the interpersonal skills of team interaction. Don't overlook their disrespect of others in favor of their technical expertise. Interact with them effectively and you'll earn the respect of the drivers and the doers. The only development options for draggers are immediate performance improvement or removal from the team. Don't play around. Deal with them swiftly and fairly.

Remember, business is a game of follow the leader. As the leader goes, so goes the team. The top leader must model effective leadership and use these techniques with the executive team, who must use them with middle managers, who must use them with supervisors, who must use them with their staff. If there is a break anywhere in the organization chart, the culture of accountability and the pursuit of zero incidents will begin to decay. It will start as a small cancer cell infecting only the area it directly impacts. Over time, the cancer will spread to other areas as more team members learn of the inconsistency in execution. If leaders at any level are allowed to continue without practicing accountability, safety excellence will remain elusive. Excellence requires consistency with accountability. Use the four steps to accountability interwoven in the three moments of truth to create a culture of strong safety accountability.

"When it comes to privacy and accountability, people always demand the former for themselves and the latter for everyone else."
— **David Brin**

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