



DYSFUNCTIONAL PRACTICES that kill your Safety Culture

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A MAN FINDS HIMSELF ON THE TOP STEP of a step ladder; a woman removes the guard to her machine; a worker is not wearing her safety glasses in the plant; a roustabout uses the wrong sized clamp instead of retrieving the right tool from the supply truck; a supervisor teaches a new worker to take short cuts; a mechanic climbs on top of the active machine to find the oil leak. Why do these folks do these things? Is it because they are stupid?

One tendency is to blame workers for safety errors and label their personal failings as the cause of the error. Labeling does not solve problems that cause error and, frankly, it may all be an illusion of human perception leading us to false conclusions. Our human tendencies result in interactions that hurt the safety of our workers and the effectiveness of the systems we put in place to protect them.

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Dysfunctional Practices

These tendencies build dysfunctional management practices that create fear associated with your safety programs. I want to teach you a better way to analyze the behaviors of your employees to understand why they were put in a position to take the risk in the first place. Your system may be perfectly designed to promote risks and create safety traps. By analyzing the context of behavior, we can discover ways to change your system to optimize safe behavior and reduce injury. This book presents new ideas and methods using stories we can all relate to.

Human behavior is at the crux of your safety program. Physics and chemistry create hazards ready to be released when things go wrong. Human behavior happens right before that release. Therefore, we look at the behavior associated with the resulting injury and blame the person as the root cause. We label the person “stupid” and feel we have solved the problem. We haven’t. Instead, a dysfunctional practice creeps into our safety management system blinding us from finding the true root causes of at-risk behavior.

Labeling, such as calling someone stupid, is a short cut when explaining the behavior of others. As humans, we are really good at fooling ourselves with the short cuts wired in our brains. We can blind ourselves from useful analyses when we use our intuition to explain, rationalize, and make attributions of other’s behavior. Our prior experiences, biases, and expectations take us down an illusionary path that may be quite different from reality. This human wiring shapes all of us in ways that further blind us from seeing the true causes of human performance.

A worker’s response to derogatory labeling is predictable and automatic, even when the labeling is not specifically directed at them. Labeling creates a workplace-wide culture of fear. Our body physically responds to negative labeling and threats of discipline with a visceral alarm that creates a black cloud over safety programs. It is an anxiety response that workers actively avoid. Who wouldn’t? If our goal is to create a safety culture in which workers are engaged with situational awareness, peer coaching, and reporting, we will fail. Our offensive labeling will create avoidance of the very engagement we desperately need from our workers.

We can’t fix people, let’s not be that pompous. But we can change behavior... [read more.](#)

For more information and an audio version of the complete article, [CLICK HERE.](#)

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