

The Self Field of Safety Performance

Looking in the Mirror

By Cort Dial

The self field is crucial when it comes to safety performance because safety inherently values individual lives.

This is the second part of a four-part series that unpacks a modern approach to improving safety in the workplace.

Traditionally, safety performance has focused on hard data and rules. The dependency is understandable, but as discussed in Part 1 (*PS*, Sept. 2017, pp. 22-23), an exclusive reliance on numbers and programs, or what I call the systems and behavior fields (Figure 1), is a mistake.

Managers, supervisors and other leaders willing to delve into a third field, the self, open themselves and their organizations to another level of performance. The self field is exactly what it appears to be: who you truly are, which encompasses subjective, internal, individual concepts such as values, knowledge, beliefs and self-image.

But how does this come into play at work? And why is superior performance enabled by it? The self field is crucial when it comes to safety performance because safety inherently values individual lives. Every "self" matters. When we think solely in terms of numbers and processes, we dehumanize one another, which contradicts the heart of safety itself. That is why neglecting the self field greatly limits performance.

In all aspects of business performance, but especially safety, how you see yourself matters. You can never outperform your own self-image. To create an incident-free workplace, all workers must believe that such a workplace is possible and that they have the ability to make it happen. It is the leader's responsibility to cultivate these beliefs in every individual team member (including the leader). Because this field involves working with minds and hearts, rather than tangible operations, working in the self field is difficult, especially for leaders who primarily value what they can see, hold and measure.

A warning for those who are fixated on the tangible and data-driven world: Numerical safety goals are dehumanizing. They turn humans into faceless figures. A company may demand such goals, but that does not mean the safety leader must share them.

The Self Is the Foundation

To create a workplace that operates without harming anyone or anything, a company must dig into the self field. The biggest obstacle to working injury-free is pretty simple: Most people do not believe they are capable of that level of performance. Put another way, they do not believe in themselves.

This is why the self is so important. What each person believes about him/herself will determine what programs that individual will embrace, what systems s/he will create, what behaviors s/he will choose to

exhibit and much more. Development in this area is foundational and essential.

So where to begin? First, understand that a leader works in the self field on two levels: the development of employees' selves and development of his/her own self.

Developing Others

Helping others to cultivate better self-images and establish key beliefs requires awareness, consistency and intention. Here is where to start:

- **Spend one-on-one time with each employee.**

Get to know each person, and learn specific ways to praise the unique gifts that person brings to the table. Ask what s/he loves and inquire about goals. Even just spending 30 minutes a few times a week for individual chats is a huge step. These interactions build people's confidence and make them feel appreciated, which helps establish trust and a sense of belonging. Trust is essential when seeking to transform workplace culture. People give more of themselves to a group to which they belong.

- **Offer opportunities for personal growth.** A leader cannot make anyone choose to develop him/herself, but a leader can provide real opportunities for such development. Encourage a young, rising leader to take a course on inspirational leadership or emotional intelligence, or assign a promising safety engineer to lead a new project. The benefits are twofold: 1) the leader shows employees s/he cares and is paying attention; and 2) a stronger team will emerge.

FIGURE 1

The Four Fields of Safety Performance



Note. Copyright Cort Dial Consulting LLC. Reprinted with permission.



Cort Dial is an award-winning author, inspirational speaker, producer of corporate events and performance coach. Learn more at www.cortdial.com/professionalsafety.



XXINING/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES PLUS

•**Relinquish control.** A leader cannot force anyone to want to, then do the work needed to, look inside. Preaching safety, imposing systems and demanding behaviors will deliver no results if employees do not believe in themselves and the group. A leader must also realize that some people will simply ignore or reject such an effort. Do it anyway.

Developing Yourself

To be the change you want to see, you must reflect honestly and work to express who you are and what you believe. Here is where to start:

•**Model self-improvement.** If encouraging employees to take a course, read a book or tackle a new challenge, they will more likely take those

risks and extra work if they see the leader doing the same. A shared culture of development and learning breeds self-confidence and collective pride, not to mention smarter solutions.

•**Have consistent self-evaluations.** Take the time to slow down and evaluate thoughts and actions. What are your goals? What have you done to get there? The best leaders also are open to feedback from employees. Sit down and ask what you could do better, then adjust where it makes sense. Never criticize someone for being honest. Speaking truth to power requires immense courage. Chances are, that person should be elevated, not ostracized.

•**Be the commitment you ask of others.** Be a walking, talking embodiment of the state of being you want your team to embrace. Speak confidently that the work performed, no matter how hazardous, can be completed without harming anyone. Foster belief by believing first.

The only acceptable goal when it comes to safety is zero, or, to put it more humanely, harming no one. If you take the steps outlined and commit to them, you will be amazed by the culture created. And, you will be ready for work in the fourth and most powerful field, the social field, which will be the focus of Part 3 in the November 2017 issue.

Smokehouse Cart Hand Safety. Made Simple.

The Fusion Tech PushPal is an innovative cart safety handle designed in response to a costly operator hand injury caused by gripping a smokehouse cart on the side edges.

- Keeps operator hands from possible crush points
- Attaches at any height for ergonomically safe use
- Locks onto most size smokehouse carts
- Reduces risk of injury
- Saves you from the high cost of employee injury

\$350
for 1 PushPal

\$300 each for 2 or more



FUSION PROTECT

FTIINC.ORG/PUSHPAL
309.774.4275



www.kineticsnoise.com/noiseblock

Hear the Difference

NOISEBLOCK™ Barrier Wall Systems

Achieve high levels of sound absorption (noise reduction) and transmission loss (noise blocking).

FEATURES

- Up to 45 dBA Noise Reduction
- Modular
- Cost effective installation
- Custom engineered

APPLICATIONS

- Industrial Equipment
- Rooftop equipment
- Electrical sub-stations
- Oil & gas compressor stations
- Residential compliance
- Loading docks
- Airports

Contact us for a risk free quote
sales@kineticsnoise.com
1-800-959-1229

