

# Safety Leadership

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Safety Professionals frequently have a wealth of training, knowledge and experience in the technical aspects of their work and the EHS field, such as hazard identification, implementation of controls, development of policies and procedures, and safety audits. These are critical, however, without *effective leadership* corresponding to these efforts, your organization will be fighting a losing battle when it comes to your risk-reduction and loss-prevention culture.

What do we mean by effective leadership? A successful leader understands people's motivations and enlists employee participation in a way that marries individual needs and interests to the group's purpose. A strong leader does not have followers because they have power. Instead, a strong leader has power because they have followers.

As Safety Professionals, we must own the responsibility of developing strong safety leaders within our organizations. Front-line supervisors are often where you will find the greatest opportunity to transform your company's safety culture, and yet, they are frequently the ones who receive the least focus on development of leadership skills.



Below are a few recommendations to improve safety leadership within your organization:

- 1) **Leadership commitment must be consistent and visible.** When hazards are not addressed relentlessly, and inconsistencies exist at the leadership level, employees lose confidence and trust in their leaders. If the leadership's commitment to safety is not visible, employees will view it as nothing more than "lip-service" coming from safety professionals and supervisors within the company.
- 2) **Tap into "discretionary effort".** Safety initiatives frequently require a behavior change from the way a task used to be done, to a new way of doing the same task. Compliance depends on each employee using his or her own discretion to decide whether or not they will put forth the incremental, discretionary effort to comply with the change. If we invest the time and effort, we can unleash discretionary effort that we are not getting from employees currently. Good leaders find out what makes each person tick, and taps into that insight to maximize engagement and commitment to safety.
- 3) **Move from rules-based to values-based.** This one is the most challenging, yet may be the most powerful. People are inherently individual, creative, and innovative, which creates unpredictability. Rules are important. However, focusing solely on the elimination of these inherent human qualities with more rules, and stronger enforcement hurts engagement, and reduces discretionary effort. Focusing on clearly defined values will help employees and leaders make better decisions, aligned with company goals, resulting in a safer, more engaged and empowered work-force.