

# On Creating a Successful Safety Culture

**Emphasis on safety practices, procedures, principles boosts employee morale, profitability**

“To have a successful safety culture we must recognize everything happens through communications,” insists **Ken Woodlin**, vice president of U.S. operations, Canopy Growth Corporation. And one of the areas that needs much more communications is that relating to the cost impact of an on-the-job injury or illness—what’s the real cost to the organization.

A resource recommended by Woodlin, OSHA’s *Safety Pays* tool ([www.OSHA.gov](http://www.OSHA.gov)), assesses the impact of 40 types of occupational injuries and illnesses on the company’s profitability. This program, according to OSHA, “uses a company’s profit margin, the average costs of an injury or illness, and an indirect multiplier to project the amount of sales a company would need to cover those costs.”

To demonstrate the impact from “typical” warehouse injuries, Woodlin selected hernia, sprain and contusion from a drop-down menu:

Injury	Direct Cost	Indirect Cost	TOTAL COST
Hernia	\$21,437	\$23,580	\$45,017
Sprain	\$30,798	\$33,877	\$64,675
Contusion	\$27,653	\$30,418	\$58,071

According to the tool’s data, for a company operating at a three-percent margin, it would have to generate almost \$3-million in additional sales to cover just the indirect costs alone; and more than \$5.59-million to cover the total cost for these injuries. As Woodlin commented: “What an eye-opener!”

Consider this bottom-line potential when eliminating/preventing a majority of these on-the-job injuries. “That alone should be the convincing business case argument for prioritizing the safety initiative,” he argues. “The job is now to go back and influence others.”

## Novel notecard reminder tool

Another “unique” communications device offered by Woodlin is the 3x5 index card containing a couple of simple, yet meaningful questions. He recommends routinely passing them out in meetings with team leaders, managers and associates. The first question on the card is, “*What will be the next injury in your department?*” It is followed by “*Why?*”

“It’s a pretty simple question,” he explains, “but now you’re holding your leaders or managers accountable. Once they document this, they’ve admitted they know where the next risk is and why.” It’s now up to them to do “something about it as they now own its prevention.”

The next set of questions on the card also are unique: “*What is the next injury in someone else’s area?*” Also followed by “*Why?*” The leaders and managers may be reluctant to “interfere” in someone else’s area, but Woodlin explains: “Go back to this whole notion of the importance of communications. If we’re not interacting and if we’re not challenging one another we definitely are not reaching our full potential.”

Naturally, follow-up is critical and he



recommends in every departmental meeting or meeting with upper management, part of the session be devoted to asking the responsible individuals about the progress they are making on eliminating the risk. This practice also gives insight into the commitment that the leaders, managers and others have toward the safety initiative.

Woodlin is not adverse, but encouraging, in carrying out the same procedure with the hourly associates. Hand out the cards and ask the associates who are in the trenches everyday doing the work, especially those working the second and third shifts.

“They are going to be able to answer these questions better than anyone,” Woodlin maintains. Also critical is to have them take ownership as they too are part of the team.

### Define root causes

The Dirty Dozen approach is preferred by Woodlin to identify the root cause of safety failures/accidents. “I guarantee that one or more of the Dirty Dozen will represent the root cause or causes of almost every incident in your facility, whether it be injury, quality defect or productivity miss,” he explains. The Dirty Dozen factors are:

1. Lack of communication
2. Distraction
3. Lack of resources
4. Stress
5. Complacency
6. Lack of teamwork
7. Pressure
8. Lack of awareness
9. Lack of knowledge
10. Fatigue
11. Lack of assertiveness
12. Norms

Within these twelve, according to Woodlin, are the most common human error preconditions or precursors to incidents. However, he assures they are not used to blame the injured party. Instead, the injured employee is recognized as actually exposing a weakness in the company’s safety program which will then be used to identify the root cause(s) of the safety system’s weakness(es).

The Dirty Dozen concept’s assumptions are:

- Humans make mistakes
- People make mistakes because they’re people...not because they are deficient in some way.
- Mistakes are common and universal.
- Error and success result from the same mental processes—can’t experience one without the other.

### Safety nets and counter measures

“You can’t solve for The Dirty Dozen, therefore safety nets and counter measures must be put in place,” offers Woodlin. As examples:

Condition	Root Cause	Countermeasures
<b>Lack of communication</b>	may result from such factors as vague wording, directions/ instructions are complex, words have multiple meanings, or the verbal communications represented only a small portion of the discussions/instructions.	The use of logbooks, worksheets and other media to communicate and remove doubt; further discussion of the work to be done or what has been completed; placement of most important information first; and never assume anything.
<b>Distraction</b>	may occur as a result of loud noises, listening to requests from others, receiving messages from home, life situations, and the timeliness of communications.	Focus on always doing the job as opposed to getting the job done; marking anything not completed; verifying and inspecting what has been completed; always going back three steps and reviewing when returning from break; and using a detailed checklist.

As Woodlin summarized: “Do your best each and every day with your communication. It’s continuous, there’s no end to it. But the more you talk about it and as long as you keep it clear and easily understandable, encourage feedback from those who do the work, you’re going to have a lot of success, and you’re going to drive a lot of cost out of your business and gain a lot profitability.”

