Skills-Based Leadership

The First-Line Supervisor
Part II

By Fred S. Drennan and David Richey

IN BRIEF
- **Supervisors are critical safety leaders.**
- **Leadership is not a rare, charismatic or inherent talent. Rather, it can be learned, observed and measured.**
- **Managers and supervisors can learn and use five essential leadership skills to produce superior results.**
- **Such systems and tools represent an opportunity for safety professionals to increase their value to their organizations.**

During more than 20 years of implementing supervisor leadership training, the authors have identified 15 leadership skills that improve safety performance in the workplace. The top five skills for motivating a group toward a common goal are:

1) Giving positive recognition.
2) Building teams.
3) Setting team goals.
4) Keeping score publicly.
5) Positioning supervisors as trainers.

In Part I (Feb. 2012, pp. 59-63), the authors addressed two of those skills: giving positive recognition and team building. Part II covers the remaining three skills—team goal setting, public scorekeeping and the supervisor as trainer—discusses skills certification and highlights a successful implementation.

Core Skill 3: Team Goal Setting for Recordbreaking Performance

Peter Drucker says, "Management by objectives works if you know the objectives. Ninety percent of the time you don't." Setting and achieving goals is, in itself, a motivator. Common personal goals include getting in shape, buying a house or graduating from college. Achieving such goals improves one's confidence and self-esteem.

Safety goals, however, rarely have the same effect as personal goals. Does the sign at the front gate showing the number of work hours since the last injury motivate individual workers to be safe? Or, does it simply remind them that one incident will take the scoreboard back to zero? Do workers know what they are supposed to do to achieve the next safety milestone? The answer is no, unless supervisors have learned the primary leadership skill of team goal setting.

Setting team goals is more than deciding what goals should be achieved. It involves determining what needs to be done to reach the goal and how long it will take to get there. An effective goal-setting technique uses the acronym SMART: specific, measurable, action-based, relevant and timely (Doran, 1981). Supervisors who learn to use the SMART approach can set safety and health records with their teams.

Goal Setting & Motivation

One additional criteria must be considered when setting goals: Employees must be assured of some kind of reasonable, timely reward. Employees are familiar with "forced goals," such as production quotas, dollar sales or number of deliveries made during a given period. These goals are set by management with little employee input. Employees and their immediate supervisors know well the consequences for failure.

Management must ensure that teams are recognized for reaching their goals and rewarded at the team level in a timely manner. Teams should not have to wait for the annual safety awards to be

Fred S. Drennan is founder and president of Team Safety Inc., a safety consulting firm in Ojai, CA. A long-time advocate of skills-based supervisor safety leadership, Drennan is creator of the Strength and Flexibility Exercise (SAFE) system, a program to integrate fitness, safety and supervisor leadership into daily operations. Drennan is a chapter author for ASSE's *The Safety Professionals Handbook.* He is a member of ASSE's Valley Coastal Chapter.

David Richey, Ph.D., is an author, consultant and industrial psychologist who speaks frequently on the subject of getting results from employee participation. Richey has helped implement quality and performance improvement programs for companies such as Kodak, Caterpillar and DuPont. He holds a Ph.D. from the Fielding Institute.

recognized for their efforts. Recognition can be as simple as verbal praise or, if a significant milestone has been reached, a celebration (Photo 1).

The supervisor should know in advance the options for rewarding team performance. The more opportunities for recognition, the better the outcomes. When teams set their own goals, such as getting in shape (Photo 2), they take an active role in reaching them. Team members will help support what they helped create. A great leader will continue to set the bar higher, making it possible to ultimately achieve a difficult goal, such as zero harm.

Core Skill 4: Public Scorekeeping for Safety

Petersen (1978) says, "When performance is consistent, regularly measured, it becomes extremely clear that the task is important to the boss" (p. 101). At random, select a few employees and ask them how many unsafe acts or near misses were reported in their department for the month. Better yet, ask their supervisor. Then ask their division manager which department is doing the best safety work. Many cannot give an accurate answer.

But go to a Major League Baseball game and ask any of 60,000 fans who is winning. They all know. Hits, runs and errors are immediately posted on the scoreboard (key performance indicators) with immediate positive or negative feedback (cheers or boos) from fans. Baseball would not be the same without the scoreboard.

People use personal scoreboards for self improvement. For example, suppose Joe decides to lose weight (goal). He weighs himself each morning and records the results (feedback) on the refrigerator door. If the results show weight gain (negative feedback) he makes adjustments (behavior change), such as reducing the intake of treats and increasing exercise.

Businesses use public scorekeeping all the time for key performance indicators such as sales, production and run times, but rarely for safety (other than the occasional injury-free work hour boards). However, if, for example, zero harm is the vision, every team should have a team goal to improve the safety environment. Safety improvements, taking corrective action and at-risk acts should be visibly posted for all to see (Photo 3, p. 52).

Learning to use safety scoreboards to provide goal setting, feedback and recognition is a key supervisor leadership skill. Key features of a team-level safety scoreboard:
- Locate it where the team holds daily safety meetings.
- Make it large enough to be seen and discussed in a group setting.
- Be sure it identifies team goals and shows progress toward achievement.
- Make sure the supervisor updates it each day to show the number of near misses, unsafe acts and conditions reported and/or resolved.
- Consider comparing team performance to other participating teams.

Photo 1: Teams celebrate 100,000 hours at zero harm at their construction site in Suriname.

Photo 2: At a mine site in Botswana, teams learn a flexibility routine to get in shape.

Core Skill 5: Supervisor As Trainer

"The prime responsibility of the supervisor is to develop his people so that they continually improve, so they can do a better job" (Sherkenbach, 1993). Safety training responsibilities are one responsibility that management often allows the supervisor to abdicate. Management often believes that compliance with OSHA regulations is complex and confusing, and deems it a topic best left to experts. This misconception leads to missed opportunities for supervisor/employee relationships.

When supervisors conduct training, they serve as powerful role models. If eliminating unsafe acts or correcting unsafe conditions is the goal, the supervisor should instruct the team how to do so. When training employees on job hazards, the supervisor should provide guidance and direction to the safety effort. When a supervisor conducts the training, there's no disconnect between what is taught and actual practice. As Buckingham and Coffman (1999) found, the supervisor has the most influence over employee performance. When a supervisor takes the time to train employees, the employees understand that the information is important and they will more likely adopt the supervisor's attitude regarding the training.

Developing a set of training program deliver- ables at the supervisor level should be a collab- orative effort between safety management and supervisors, since each supervisor knows his/her team's strengths and weaknesses.

Once the training has been identified and deliv- ered, the supervisor can evaluate its effectiveness. For example, if the team was trained to report near misses and unsafe acts, yet no reports are filed, the supervisor must ask why. If the training failed to address some significant underlying issues, it must be redesigned and redelivered.

Certifying Supervisor Leadership Skills

The purpose of all training is to improve on-the- job performance. However, significant resources are wasted each year on training that does not elic- it behavior change in the workplace (NSC, 2001). Leadership training is certain to suffer the same fate unless a process is in place to certify skills ap- plication on the job.

Because supervisors play a critical role in an or- ganization's success, companies should demand the same level of excellence from their supervisors as in other professions. When upper management provides support and incentives, using the right tools and systems, an average supervisor can be-

come a good safety leader and a good supervisor can become a great one. It follows that the more supervisors an or- ganization certifies in specific leadership skills, the more likely the organization will achieve greatness.

Coaching the Supervisor: A Critical Process

Without feedback, no learning occurs. Skilled coaches must be available to ob- serve and coach supervisors as they ap- ply the skills on the job. Once supervisors demonstrate competency in a specific skill, they can be certified in that skill. Certification in the skill sets should be- come a part of the supervisor's overall performance review.

Who Certifies?

Who evaluates supervisors' on-the-job applica- tion of leadership skills? Successful programs use in-house coaches. They can be a team of trained coaches from different disciplines, managers trained in the processes or, better yet, other super- visors who have mastered the skill sets (peer-to- peer evaluation).

In the peer-to-peer model, supervisors observe and score each other's performance to validate skill use. Certification should be a step-wise approach, with quarterly objectives to provide frequent oppor- tunity for achievement and recognition (Table 1).

Leadership certification provides a method for continuous improvement. Without certification, no system of value or accountability is in place to ensure that supervisors continue to learn and ap- ply their skills on the job. Skills certification is not a one-time event. It must be periodically renewed and results included in the supervisors' perfor- mance reviews, along with productivity and quality performance.

Leadership certification also can:
•provide an objective method to evaluate super- visor safety performance;
•reduce variation in supervisor performance;
•standardize a recognition system for supervisor achieve- ment;
•establish a system to deliv- er high-quality feedback and continuous improvement;
•establish a learning envi- ronment that encourages best practices.

The Role of Senior Management

How supervisors perform in the leadership program is a function of how well senior management applies its award system. Supervisors will only participate if they perceive the reward equals the effort. If no

Table 1

Quarterly Goals Provide Opportunity for Recognition

SAFE training	Safety and health training	Leadership skills and safety systems	Skills level
Phase I Static stretching	Flexibility as a core element of health and safety	Workshop 1—Supervisors: "The Key Is Success" •Giving positive recognition •Supervisor as trainer	Bronze
Phase II Functional stretching	Preventing back injuries	Workshop 2—Building high performance safety teams •Team building •Reporting near misses	Silver
Phase III Stretching with fitness sticks	Preventing upper limb injuries	Workshop 3—Controlling Hazards: A Team Effort •Reporting unsafe conditions •Lowering Tolerance levels	Gold
Phase IV Stretching with fitness cords	Maintaining balanced strength to prevent strains	Workshop 4—Achieving Record-Breaking Safety and Health Performance •Giving constructive feedback •Reporting unsafe acts •Setting team goals •Obtaining suggestions	MBA certification

consequences (positive or negative) result, the status quo likely will continue. On the other hand, if the supervisor believes the award is rewarding, the organization will see a transformation where safety first really is safety first (Photo 4).

Conclusion

In 1915, Robert Frost wrote, "Two roads diverged in a wood and I—I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference." The effectiveness of safety programming is reduced by the inability to integrate safety into the regular management system (Petersen, 1978).

After 30 years in the safety field, these authors agree with Petersen, after having tried traditional activities such as developing safety manuals, displaying safety banners and posters, arranging safety banquets and safety training. Safety awards, compliance inspections and industrial hygiene surveys were a regular part of these safety efforts. Management was trained on root-cause analysis and the latest trends in behavior-based safety. Even though well received, these programs did not make a real difference in day-to-day operations. This reality was brought home by a senior executive who said, "We do our work first, then we do safety."

As a staff person, the SH&E professional is the wrong person to lead a large workforce in the daily safety effort. Integrating safety leadership into the organizational structure begins at the safety department, but to truly integrate safety into the operational structure safety professionals must refocus their efforts on the true safety leader.

So who is the safety leader? The answer can be found as far back as the 1920s with the Hawthorne experiments (Roughton & Mercurio, 2002), the studies by Likert (1961) and the comprehensive study by Buckingham and Coffman (1999). These studies have shown that the supervisor, in particular his/her management style, has a profound influence on employee productivity and attitudes. "Supervisors with the best performance focus their primary attention on the human aspect of their subordinate's problems and on building effective work groups with high performance goals" (Petersen, 1999).

To sum it up, the supervisor is where the rubber

Case Study: IAMGOLD's MBA Leadership Program

IAMGOLD (IAG), a Canadian firm, is a leading midtier gold mining company with operations on three continents. In a short period, the company grew from 100 employees to more than 4,000 with more than 200 supervisors.

In 2009, IAG authorized pilot projects to develop a standardized framework to achieve IAG's worldwide ethic-based vision of zero harm. The company acknowledged that achieving this goal required highly competent supervisors with the necessary leadership skills.

Jordan Vince, IAG's manager of health and safety, said of the workforce, "We had employees coming directly from mud huts with dirt floors to our mining operations." This was their challenge. What evolved was the mind body achievement (MBA) program, which Vince describes as a "team-based safety and fitness program driven by strong supervisor leadership skills."

Two pilot sites were chosen, one in Quebec, Canada, one in Suriname. The Canadian project employed French-speaking union workers representing more than a dozen craft trades. During construction, temperatures ranged from 21 ºC to -40 ºC. Suriname is a hot, tropical country, where nonunion contractors spoke primarily Dutch. Despite extreme differences in climate and culture, language and customs, the MBA program transcended the barriers with remarkable results compared to non-MBA sites (Table 2).

Photo 4: IAG supervisors and project team awarded MBA certification.

The five leadership skills discussed in this article were an essential component of the MBA program and played a significant role in achieving these results. The site without the program lacked the framework to motivate workers to improve safety performance. Based on these results, the sites were the first to be awarded the IAG President's Award for ZERO HARM. The CEO acknowledged that the company achieved a great deal of success with the program and will continue to expand its breadth and scope.

In addition to the skills-based system, significant factors contributed to this success:

• Before implementation, the full executive staff and operations personnel received training on skills-based leadership.

• IAG's current practices for awards, incentives and bonuses were examined to determine how supervisors and mine managers were compensated for safety performance. Before startup, a new system of awards, incentives and recognition was developed and integrated into the program.

• Pivotal to success was the MBA daily work card. Each day, every site worker used the card to record unsafe acts/conditions, suggestions and other observations. Supervisors then randomly selected cards for individual performance dialogs. In these face-to-face conversations, employees were recognized and rewarded for their safety efforts. This resulted in 4,000 reports submitted at each site.

• Project managers made a commitment that all reported safety hazards reported through the new system would be corrected within 48 hours.
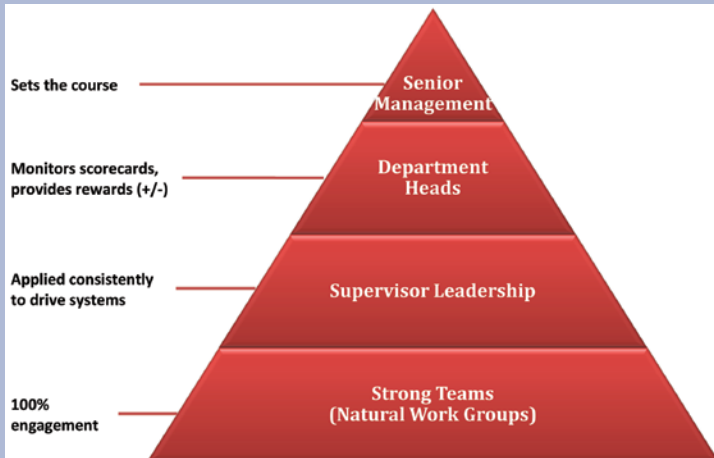
Table 2
MBA Program

Scorekeeping metrics	MBA program Quebec, Canada	MBA program Suriname, S.A.	Non-MBA Canada
Months at zero harm	18	11	Not reported
Hours worked (approximate)	230,000	179,000	803,200
Total recordable incident rate	**0**	**0**	**19.17**
Logged observations, suggestions, near misses, unsafe acts/conditions	3,964	More than 4,400	4
Corrective actions completed within 48 hours	98.6%	97.1%	No policy
Delivery of positive recognition	5,296	More than 550	4
MBA daily sessions with stretching	570	450	N/A

MBA program achieves zero harm on gold mining construction sites.

Figure 1
Employee Engagement

Sets the course — Senior Management

Monitors scorecards, provides rewards (+/-) — Department Heads

Applied consistently to drive systems — Supervisor Leadership

100% engagement — Strong Teams (Natural Work Groups)

To get 100% employee engagement, the safety professional's role is to ensure that senior management sets the course, department heads monitor scorecards and provide rewards, and supervisors consistently apply skills that drive the systems.

meets the road. If the corporate vision is zero harm, supervisors must be trained in leadership skills to motivate specific behavior to eliminate injuries. In the brief case study on p. 53, supervisors applied their leadership skills to set goals to increase the number of reports/actions on unsafe acts, near misses, unsafe conditions and safety suggestions. The result was more than 4,000 reports at each construction site.

How do these specific leadership skills achieve results? Positive recognition creates a climate that motivates increased participation in safety activity. Team building creates the trusting relationships needed to report unsafe acts, near misses and unsafe conditions so they can be corrected.

Team goal setting uses SMART goals and gets people's consensus to work toward those goals. Public scorekeeping motivates competition and provides a further basis for feedback, recognition and reward. Having the supervisor deliver training recognizes his/her responsibility to ensure that appropriate training is applied on the job, every day.

Supervisor leadership is key to motivating workers to set and achieve their goals. However, to successfully fuel this activity, management, especially middle management, must provide supervisors with the appropriate awards, incentives and recognition for their leadership activity. "Supervisors will achieve results in those areas in which management is measuring" (Petersen, 1978, p. 16). Middle management should link performance metrics to supervisors' use of the five core safety leadership skills at the same value as metrics for quality and productivity.

Spearheading this new endeavor represents a less-traveled road for SH&E professionals. SH&E professionals must adopt a more effective role as a developer of leaders, not only for supervisors but also for senior and middle management (Figure 1). Learning the tools and skills described in this article will help SH&E professionals build an SH&E program that is fully integrated into the management process where zero harm can become a reality. **PS**

References

Blanchard, K. & Bowles, S. (2001). *High five: The magic of working together.* New York, NY: Harper Collins.

Bradford, D.L. & Cohen, A.R. (1997). *Managing for excellence: The leadership guide to developing high performance in contemporary organizations.* New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.

Buckingham, M. & Coffman, C. (1999). *First, break all the rules: What the world's greatest managers do differently.* New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Doran, G.T. (1981). There's a S.M.A.R.T. way to write management's goals and objectives. *Management Review, 70*(11), 35-36.

Drennan, F. (2005). Steps to a healthier U.S. workforce. Presentation at NASA 2005: Toward a Healthier Workforce, Lake Tahoe, CA.

Drennan, F. & Drennan, K. (2008). Best practices for workers' compensation. In J. Haight (Ed.), *The Safety Professionals Handbook.* Des Plaines, IL: ASSE.

Drennan, F., Richey, D. & Ramsay, J. (2006, Jan.). Integrating employee safety and fitness: A model for meeting NIOSH's Steps to a Healthier U.S. Workforce challenge. *Professional Safety, 51*(1), 26-35.

Edmans, A. (in press). Does the stock market fully value intangibles? Employee satisfaction and equity prices. *Journal of Financial Economics.* Retrieved June 11, 2011, from **http://finance.wharton.upenn.edu/~aedmans/Rowe.pdf**.

Ellemers, N., De Gilder, D. & Haslam, S. (2004). Motivating individuals and groups at work: A social identity perspective on leadership and group performance. *Academy of Management Review, 29*(3), 459-478.

Frost, R. (1915). *Mountain interval.* New York, NY: Henry Holt & Co. Retrieved Aug. 31, 2011, from **www.archive.org/stream/mountaininterv00frosrich#page/n7/mode/2up**.

George, S. (2011). Observations from the front line: Information you need to build the organization you want [Web log post]. Retrieved June 11, 2011, from **www.baldrige.com/category/criteria_leadership**.

Haslam, S. (2011). *The new psychology of leadership: Identity, influence and power.* New York, NY: Psychology Press.

Likert, R. (1961). *New patterns of management.* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

National Safety Council (NSC). (2001). *Accident prevention manual for business and industry: Administration and programs.* Itasca, IL: Author.

Petersen, D. (1978). *Safety by objectives.* Huntington, NY: Aloray Publishing.

Petersen, D. (1999). *Safety supervision.* Des Plaines, IL: ASSE.

Petersen, D. (2001). *Safety management: A human approach.* Des Plaines, IL: ASSE.

Richey, D. (1998). *The meeting leader's action packet.* San Diego, CA: Pfeiffer & Co.

Roughton, J.E. & Mercurio, J. (2002). *Developing an effective safety culture: A leadership approach.* Boston, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Sherkenbach, W. (1993). *The Deming route to quality and productivity.* Washington, DC: Cee Press.