



The Best *Vs.* Worst

by Mackenzie Wilson

The World's Best Safety Experts tackle the worst and most persistent safety problems.

Felt Leadership: Are They Feeling It?

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SafeStart author Larry Wilson asked an important question when moderating a SafeConnection Expert Panel recently: could 'felt leadership' be the key to world class safety performance, to the glittering prize of zero harm?

What is 'felt leadership'? Real, genuine engagement from management to both care about employee health and safety – and demonstrate that care through their behaviour.

Expert view: The panellists were unanimous. Felt leadership is necessary but will not take your company over the line. "Yes – it starts from there", said Ahmed Khalil, Director of EHS at BABCO Middle East, "but the leaders themselves can't make everything happen on their own; everyone in the organisation needs to make [safety excellence] happen."

Doing it right: The critical piece is getting a communication system in place so that employees experience the commitment from top management, noted Dr Praveena Dorathi,

Head EHS, West Asia at JL. This will boost *employee engagement*.

The weakest link is cascading, Arun Subramanian, Associate Vice President & Head HSE at Coromandel International Limited, said. Getting the *health and safety* message and commitment across to everyone involved is vital.

- Cascading means authentic *leadership and management* being shown at all levels: once his company realised the importance of front-line leadership and the power of consistent messaging, it began spending a lot of time building those leadership capabilities at lower levels, noted Peter Batrowny, President & CEO, PB Global EHS, Inc.

- "Leadership needs to be exhibited at all levels, even the supervisory level – especially when trying to get positive change within an organisation", said Dr. Waddah Ghanem, Senior Director - Logistics and Marine Assurance at ENOC.

- Besides providing direction for the organisation, modelling the appropriate behaviour and making the system run are key attributes for senior leaders.



Key insight from SafeStart's Larry Wilson: "Giving leaders some practical tools that they could actually see themselves using, like Rate Your State or Anticipating Error conversations would be a good place to start". Why? Sometimes leaders feel uncomfortable doing site walkarounds or lack effectiveness because they might not have technical knowledge at the level they'd like.

Making it work in the real world: Okay, felt leadership can work if done right, but what are the panellists' tips on crossing the bridge between management commitment and employee belief in that commitment and openness to the health and safety message?

- Give the 'what's in it for me' to the leader. In other words, show them the benefits of safety and quality on the bottom line (Ed Stephens, Global HSE/SA Audit, Assurance & Senior Lead Investigator at ABB);

- Explain to leaders what the worst-case scenario could be in a language that they can understand (Praveena);

- Connect with employees in informal settings such as at the pub, in the gym or around the community (Panel).

Don't forget the contractors, cautioned Larry Wilson! Panellists around the world agreed wholeheartedly:

- Narayan Chaudhari (HSE Manager at Pipeline Infrastructure Limited) told listeners that every quarter his company has a Town Hall with all the employees, including contractors: "In these discussions safety is equally important as production, quality, and cost – that is the message that is going to everyone".

- "We don't differentiate between who is an employee and who is a contractor", said Salman Abdulla, Executive Vice President at Emirates Global Aluminium. "Safety is a core value of the organisation they are working for. It's a condition of the contract."



- "Safety is a competitive advantage" according to Hector Salazar, General Manager Construction Safety at HPCL-Mittal Energy Limited, whose company works with around 15-20 thousand contractors. "It's not just about leadership coming from the main company but also all the other companies partnered on the project".



Key insight from SafeStart: a lot of HSE or top managers get a value for safety from an adverse event in the past, for example an event with a tragic outcome. "That's a hard lesson to learn", said Teg Matthews, Vice President at SafeStart, "so there is a responsibility on the rest of us to teach people that value without having to learn that lesson the hard way".



Take Aways

- ✓ Beyond the obvious good it does, world class safety is also a competitive advantage.
- ✓ Felt Leadership is necessary to achieve safety culture excellence, but safety excellence requires an effective communication system to garner employee buy-in.
- ✓ Leadership needs to be exhibited at all levels, even the supervisory level, and involve the contractors as much as the employees.
- ✓ Use the right language and examples for the right audience, from the boardroom to the shop floor.

- Based on SafeConnection panels on North America, Europe, The Middle East, India and Asia.
- All opinions expressed in here are purely those of the panelists. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of SafeStart and the panelists' companies.
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