



Building Accountability for Safety Leadership



Safety is about leadership: that's not a new concept.

Yet, for many years, leadership as it relates to safety has often been defined as support, which at times translates to just don't impede the process. Traditionally, leaders at the highest levels of an organization have fulfilled their mandate for such support by including safety in the corporate mission statement and the operational budget. Of course, behavior-based safety (BBS) professionals have known for quite a while that the success of our efforts hinges upon how adept we are in building leadership support for BBS systems. However, over the years, our interest in, focus on, and definition of leadership support has evolved . . . and for good reason.

From real-life experience and on-site research we have discovered that leadership safety support—from supervisors to CEO—must be actively visible to be optimally effective. As our company, Quality Safety Edge (QSE), has grown and acquired both large national and international clients, we have changed our requirements of leadership. Why? Because the evidence reveals that doing so is absolutely necessary. For example, the data from one of our early studies, published in *Professional Safety* magazine, shows that when leaders perform the safety observations/walk

arounds in their facilities and are actively engaged in those observations, they attain higher levels of participation in safety observations from employees, a key part of a successful BBS process. (McSween, 2000, see graphs below.)

In facilities where leaders do 80 percent of the observations they are scheduled to do, those facilities average better than 60 percent voluntary employee participation in conducting BBS observations. Our research also reveals that this type of active leadership involvement isn't only important during the first year of our implementation; it becomes even more important for sustaining such initiatives (see the second graph below). We have replicated this correlation in a variety of other organizations. From my perspective, this correlation is not so much about leadership modeling the behavior, but rather it appears to affect a leader's credibility. In other words, when the leaders asked their reports to participate by conducting safety observations and feedback, the credibility of that request is higher if the employees see that the leaders make time to conduct safety observations and feedback.

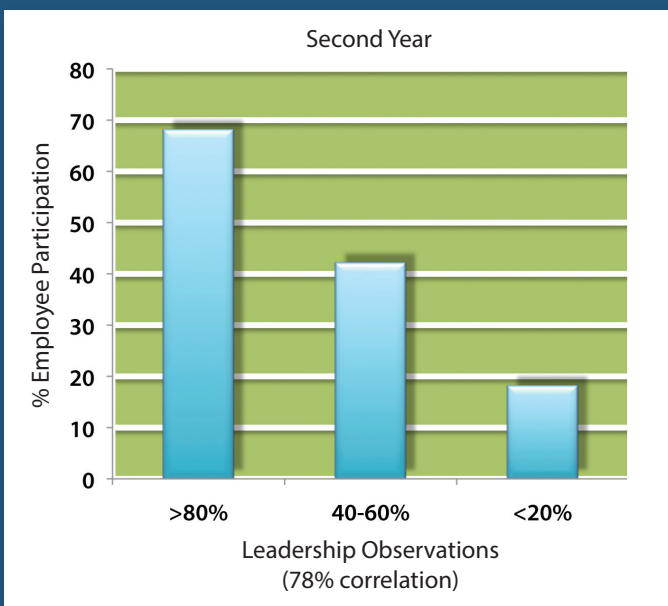
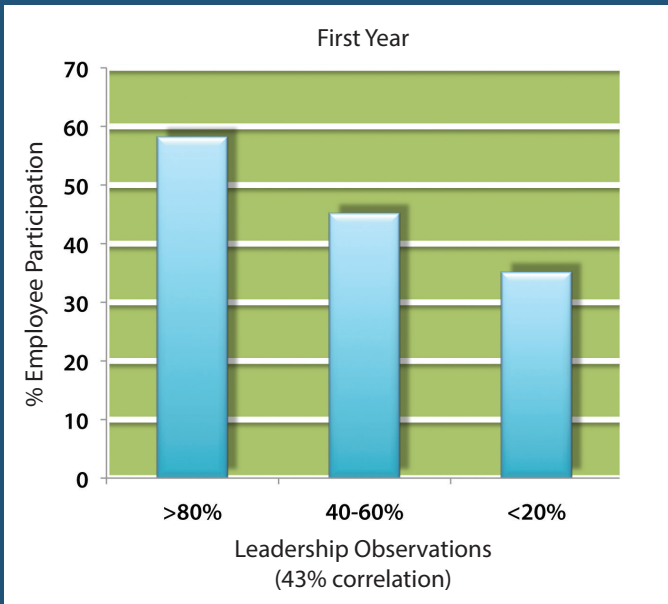
Leadership Is Important

Employee Participation as a Function of Leadership Observations

This discovery was a big deal in the early stages of behavior-based safety because in those early days many of our competitors were implementing behavioral observation systems that only involved employees. (Some BBS consultants still take that approach.) However, with data supporting our approach, we began to routinely track leadership participation. Today, if a company wants a behavior-based safety process but they don't want us to work with leadership, the bare minimum we will do is track leadership participation in conducting observation. A basic report allows us to see who is doing observations and the number of total observations they've done over any period of time ranging from one month to twelve months. With this report, we can also look at designated observers and/or supervisors, and possibly incorporate that information into the performance appraisal. Typically, this remains the bare minimum of our intervention in working with leadership when implementing a BBS process, and we still do some of implementations that take that approach. More typically however, we now bundle an intervention focused on leaders throughout the organization, and on getting them more engaged in promoting safety, parallel to the implementation of our behavioral safety efforts. In other words, our projects have a dual, separate but equal focus on BBS and safety leadership.

In his article "Exploratory Analyses of the Effects of Managerial Support and Feedback Consequences on Behavioral Safety Maintenance" published in the *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management*, Dominic Cooper makes the overall point that employees need to see leaders doing something to support safety every week. In the case of BBS, it is probably not as critical that the something is a safety observation, but employees need to see leaders at every level engaged in activities that promote safety; whether they ensure that a safety related work order gets addressed, do a safety observation and feedback, host a safety meeting, or participate in a safety committee meeting. The takeaway from his work is that we really need to focus on visible safety leadership.

I was very pleased when Atul Gawande's excellent book, *The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Done Right* was published, even though I admit I was a bit disappointed that he didn't mention behavior-based safety. In the BBS field, we have used checklists extensively for some time, including





those around leadership behaviors (sometimes as simple as a yes/no pertaining to doing a certain behavior or a frequency count). One of the things I liked about Gawande's book is the explanation of the many different ways to structure checklists. As I read this book, I began thinking about our approach to safety leadership and it occurred to me that there are other forms of checklists. I have found it easier, when talking with leaders, to talk about structuring their agenda for safety and what they're going to cover in their staff meetings, rather than talk about the leadership checklists we have been using for the past fifteen years.

Now I'm talking their language! Senior managers find it more acceptable to talk about creating a systematic review of a structured, recurring agenda at each level of the organization, rather than creating and reviewing data from leadership checklists at each level of the organization. The way we talk about it has changed, the format of the checklists has changed, but the process creates the same, or better, level of accountability for leadership practices in support of safety.

Granted, at times a leadership checklist may be more appropriate, for example when there are a variety of

kinds of behaviors, the checklist may provide a better prompt or provide better guidance, but I have had better success with structuring the agendas at different levels of the organization. Additionally, agendas have some advantages over checklists. With leadership checklist we are tracking leadership behavior the same way we are tracking the safety practices of employees: entering the data into computers, creating reports, and so forth. When we use a structured agenda, we can basically set that up as a paper-and-pencil effort. Give leaders a notebook with dividers for each meeting or direct report, agenda forms for each section, and they can more conveniently track their safety activities. This approach also provides other advantages, flexibility being one of them. Leaders may be talking about lock out/tag out issues this month, but (possibly driven by the observation data or near miss data or, worse case, incident data) they can easily change the focus for the following month. They can cascade this method in a systematic way down through the organization, increasing alignment and accountability for both safety and BBS. The table below summarizes the key considerations in each approach.

Safety Leadership Checklists

- Distinct checklist of critical safety leadership practices
- Strive for consistency
- Adds recording and reporting tasks
- Computerized reporting
- Formal reports

Recurring Agenda Items

- Agenda defines a few critical behaviors
- Flexible, can change focus
- Builds on existing structure
- Recording done in meeting minutes
- Paper/binder based



Cascaded Coaching

One of our clients experienced an interesting problem: all of their incidents in one division occurred when a supervisor wasn't present. This may sound odd, but this particular division was comprised largely of remote workers, usually out in the field and separated by many miles. During the assessment, we looked at the points of contacts between each level of leadership and the next, from the Director down through the front line employees. The Director had a weekly staff meeting with his managers. During this meeting, the first agenda item was always safety. They routinely went beyond the reviewing incidents and discussed safety observations, near misses and safety action items. Managers routinely talked with leads via cell phone or in person to discuss daily schedules and assignments. These discussions also routinely included the above mentioned topics, often adding encouragement to their leads to conduct safety observations. The leads always started each day with a tailgate safety meeting that would include a review of JSA's, discuss the potential hazards and how to mitigate those hazards. Leads often had multiple jobs, so once the tailgate was complete they would designate an employee to take lead on the job and then would take a portion of the crew and go to another jobsite. Finally, late in the day the lead would place a cell phone call to the designated employee to check progress on the job.

They were doing many things right, but we worked with them to fine tune each point of contact to address practices that would help prevent injuries when the supervi-

sors were not present. We positioned this as leadership development and asked each level to review the quality of the safety efforts at each level, with an objective of improving the quality of observations and discussions about safety on the job. The Director began to ask managers about the discussion they had with their leads around safety and the quality of the tailgates. The managers began to talk with the leads about the quality of the conversations that took place at the tailgate meetings. Did they think that people were involved? How did the employees respond to the discussion? What did the leads see them doing differently? How did what the designated employee telling you about their observations compare with what the lead observed when doing similar observations? Part of the purpose of the conversations between the lead and the designated employee was to explicitly to help the designated employee develop their safety leadership skills, and to more explicitly enlist and define their help in preventing injuries.

Finally, and this was perhaps most significant, we added a safety component to the final cell phone call from the lead to the designated employee at the end of the day. We had the leads routinely start these phone calls with a discussion about the designate employees efforts to prevent injury. The leads asked if the steps discussed in the tailgate were successful in mitigating the hazards they had identified in their discussion. Further, they asked if conditions changed from what they had planned, and if so, what kind hazards the change created, what kind of discussion they had with coworkers about the new



hazards, what worked for them and what they might do differently the next time they had a similar job. As with the other levels, we provided a formal agenda to prompt these discussions, though the leads were allowed to adapt the questions to the context of the job.

Close Calls (or Near Miss Reporting)

Another thing we've done is to add close calls (or more traditionally, near misses) to the BBS observation process. During the feedback discussions, observers simply ask their coworkers if they've seen any near misses. This seems to be a much better way of capturing near misses. Observers then write the details in the comments section of the observation form. The details then get entered into the computer, and at the end of the month, they generate a list of all of the comments so that the safety committee has the opportunity to review each one of them and take do further analysis and take action when necessary. This is fairly easy to do and provides a much higher rate of data on near misses, close calls, and minor first-aid kinds of injuries than our clients ever got from any kind of paper recording system even when compared to providing incentives for reporting these kinds of events. Reporting close calls in conversation is easier for the employees than filling out a formal report of the near incident.

The Safety Leadership (R)evolution

I tell companies that if you only put safety first on the agenda, that makes you about a "C" student. Almost all companies that we work with do this even before we start working with them. However, the way most com-

panies do it is by asking, "Did we have any injuries? Was there an incident or near miss?" and then if the answer is no, they go on to talk about other things, such as quality, production, and costs. I have often said that behavioral safety is as much about safety leadership behaviors as it is about employee behaviors. We want every level of leadership asking their reports "What have you done to promote safety in the last week and what are you going to do in the coming week?"

Company leaders at every level need to be visible and having conversations about safety with the employees in their workplace, and they need to talk about the behaviors that promoting safety in their meetings at every level. In staff meetings, we want the Director or Site Manager to ask each of his direct reports what they did last week and what they are going to do this week to improve or promote safety. That's much more important than communicating expectations and talking about mission statements.

Preaching and talking about expectations is not as critical as first asking about safety and reviewing what is being done to promote safety, and only then providing direction or feedback -- thus signaling the importance of safety. These kinds of activities need to occur every week. Therefore, we are very explicit about the purpose of BBS and leadership's role in creating a culture where we take care of one another.

References: Cook, S., and McSween, T.E. (2000) The Role of Supervisors in Behavioral Safety Observations. Professional Safety, October, 33-36.



About the Author

Terry McSween, Ph.D. is CEO of Quality Safety Edge (QSE). In 1990, Terry founded QSE, a company that specializes in the application of behavioral technology to create employee-driven safety and quality improvement efforts.

Terry is the developer of Values-Based Safety™, which creates ownership for organizational change through local-level employee involvement in the safety design process.

Considered one of the world's leading authorities in behavior-based safety, Terry has 30-plus years of experience consulting in educational, institutional, and business settings. He is the recipient of local and national awards for his work in behavioral safety and is actively involved with a number of business and professional organizations including the Board of Trustees for the Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies, the Association for Behavior Analysis, the American Society for Safety Engineers, and the Texas Association for Behavior Analysis.

A speaker at safety conferences worldwide, Terry also founded the annual Behavioral Safety Now Conference (BSN). He has published over 100 articles and authored the seminal book on behavior-based safety: *The Values-Based Safety Process: Improving Your Safety Culture with Behavior-Based Safety*.

He received his doctorate from Western Michigan University.

The role that management and supervision play in supporting behavioral safety should ultimately be tailored to the unique needs of each organization and its safety process. As with the other elements of behavioral safety, one size simply does not fit all. —Terry McSween



Quality Safety Edge

Who is Quality Safety Edge?

Global Leader in Customized Solutions

Quality Safety Edge (QSE) offers a value proposition that other performance improvement companies cannot. Their team of experienced consultants work collaboratively with you to design customized performance improvement system that integrate into your organization's unique operational environment and culture.

The QSE team of experienced consultants are experts in applying behavioral technology from a systems perspective – ensuring key behaviors at all organizational levels are occurring consistently. Their systems are designed using proven behavioral technology to engage employees, develop leaders, and create cultures which align with your goals. QSE consultants work with you to clearly define your goals and the critical activities at each level of your organization needed to achieve those goals. The QSE/client team then creates systems to ensure these critical performances are occurring consistently. QSE's customized solutions are built for sustainability.

The Quality Safety Edge team of consultants has been recognized globally for their integrity and commitment to collaborative partnerships with their clients, particularly for their proprietary behavior-based safety process, Values-Based Safety. With thousands of implementations worldwide, in almost every type and size of business and industry, QSE consultants are known for the depth and breadth of their problem-solving skills and their ability to create customized, sustainable safety and performance improvement solutions adapted to significant differences in management style and social structures throughout the world.

Customized Solutions to Meet Your Goals

- **Assessments**
 - Safety Culture System Assessment
 - BBS Readiness Assessment
 - BBS Health Check
- **Behavior-Based Safety**
 - Values-Based Safety®
 - BBS Essentials®
 - Safety Observation and Conversation Train-the-Trainer
 - Managing Your BBS Process Training
 - BBS Reboot
- **Leadership Development**
- **Serious Incident PreventionSM**
 - Serious Incident PreventionSM for Senior Leadership
 - Serious Incident PreventionSM for Frontline Leadership
- **Hazard Recognition**
- **Observation Data Management**
 - Data Management Services
 - Safety Action Planning Workshop
- **Behavioral Quality ImprovementTM**
- **Speakers**



International Reach

A global economy is no longer a future vision, but a reality and a necessity. However, doing business internationally requires much more than mutual commerce; it requires in-depth customer knowledge. With 30 years' experience, Quality Safety Edge has developed customized solutions for clients in 27 countries.

Not only is QSE's ability to work with different cultures and languages a key factor in our clients' decisions in choosing us to help them meet their goals, but our clients are delighted that we customize our solutions to their local culture, business, and industry. In short, we come in as partners. We work collaboratively with our clients to customize solutions around your management style, your company culture, and your unique goals.

Industries We Have Worked In

- Construction
- Chemical Process plants
- Defense Contractors
- Electric Utilities (including generation and T&D)
- Heavy Equipment
- Maintenance
- Manufacturing
- Oil & Gas Production and Exploration
- Oil & Gas Pipelines
- Refining
- Warehousing & Distribution
- Health Care
- And many others!



The Mining Group

Quality Safety Edge's Mining Group has many years of experience implementing behavioral solutions in diverse mining operations. From the Arctic to the tip of Peru, our consultants have created award-winning safety cultures across the globe.

Many of our consultants are natives of South and Central America and are fluent in Spanish, Portuguese, and English. Their diverse experience provides them with insights into many types of mining operations, the culture of the countries in which they are located, and a deep understanding of the people who do the work.



QualitySafetyEdge

Excellence through Behavioral Technology

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