

Health & Safety Leadership by George Robotham - (People do not care how much you know, they want to know how much you care-Alexander G.)

Leadership Perspectives

Having survived a number of years in industry the author is acutely aware that leadership of an organisation can make or break the organisation. The importance of leadership is vastly underrated in Australian industry, leadership is the forgotten key to excellence in business.

This author has worked for a very small number of great leaders and a large number of lousy leaders, he is of the view that leadership in Australian industry often falls short of the mark.

The serious student of leadership is directed towards General Norman Schwarzkopf's autobiography "It Doesn't Take a Hero" (1993)

The book "A Bastard of a Place" by Peter Brune details the battles between Australian soldiers and the Japanese in World War 2 at Papua (including Kokoda). If you want to see real leadership in action this is the place to look.

Framework of What Follows

The majority of what follows is the wise words of acknowledged experts in leadership generally, and health & safety leadership specifically, gained after extensive research into this topic.

A Leadership generally

Personal experience of leadership

Early in his OHS career the author made an error of judgement while working for a safety consultancy organisation. The General Manager attempted to discipline him in a team meeting. The author's manager intervened and took full responsibility for the author's mistake. The author later thanked the manager who explained he did what he did to send messages to 3 groups of people.

1 The General Manager-"No-one stuffs with my people, discipline of my people is my responsibility and it will only be used when all other avenues have been explored and it will always be positive and done in private."

2 You-"You were feeling down and I wanted to let you know you were still a valued member of my team"

3 Other team members-"I am in charge of this outfit and no-one else interferes with my team. Making mistakes that we learn from is perfectly acceptable"

It has taken the author 30 years and reading extensively about leadership to realise the significance of what Manager A did that day-Leaders send out messages, often subtly, about what they value and expect.

The author subsequently received another job offer and initially declined because he felt he would be letting his manager down if he accepted the offered position. When the manager became aware through a third party what the author did he convinced the author to take the position. Now that is leadership!

Management Commitment

Livermore(in Carter, Ulrich & Goldsmith, p46) observes "The best system or model in the world is not going to do your organisation a bit of good unless you have a top down commitment to making it work. Your board of directors, C.E.O., and senior management have to be firmly committed to being the best of the best .The set the tone and direction of the entire organisation. This creates a trickle-down effect throughout the organisation. Once mid-level management and low level

employees see top executives leading the way, most of them will begin to support the initiative as well.”

Kouzes on leadership(The Art & Practice of Leadership Coaching)

The most important quality people look for and admire in a leader is personal credibility. Credibility is the foundation of leadership. If we do not believe in the messenger we will not believe the message. And what is credibility behaviourally?. The most frequent response is “Do what you say you will do”, or “DWYSYWD” for short.

Leaders must be clear about their beliefs. They must know what they stand for. Then they must put what they say into practice, they must act on their beliefs.

The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership-John C. Maxwell (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville,1998)

1 The Law of the Lid(Leadership ability determines a person’s level of effectiveness)

The lower an individual’s ability to lead, the lower the lid on his potential.

The higher the leadership, the greater the effectiveness.

2 The Law of Influence (The true measure of leadership is influence- Nothing more, nothing less)

Leadership is about influencing people to follow, management is about maintaining systems and processes

3 The Law of Process(Leadership develops daily, not in a day)

4 The Law of Navigation (Anyone can steer the ship, but it takes a leader to chart the course)

Foresee your course of action and plan appropriately

5 The Law of E.F.Hutton (When the real leader speaks, people listen)

To be a leader figure out who the natural leaders are and use their influence

6 The Law of Solid Ground(Trust is the foundation of leadership)

Get your people on side before making decisions. Trust is the foundation of leadership. Make sound decisions, admit your mistakes, put what is best for your followers and the organisation ahead of personal agendas.

7 The Law of Respect (People naturally follow leaders stronger than themselves)

8 The Law of Intuition(Leaders evaluate everything with a leadership bias)

The Law of Intuition is based on facts plus instincts and other intangible factors.

9 The Law of Magnetism (Who you are, is who you attract)

Effective leaders are always on the lookout for good people. People like you will seek you out.

10 The Law of Connection (Leaders touch a heart before they ask for a hand)

You can’t move people to action unless you first move them with emotion. The heart comes before the head. The stronger the relationship and connection between individuals, the more likely the follower will want to help the leader. Always go out of your way to connect with your people.

11 The Law of the Inner Circle(A leaders potential id determined by those closest to him)

If those closest are strong the leader can make an impact, if not the leader cannot make an impact. Never stop improving your inner circle.

12 Law of Empowerment (Only secure leaders give power to others)

The people’s capacity to achieve is determined by their leader’s ability to empower. The greatest things happen only when you give others the credit. People support what they create

13 The Law of Reproduction (It takes a leader to raise up a leader)

Most people are influenced to become leaders by another leader.

14 The Law of Buy-In (People buy into the leader then the vision)

People must buy into you before they will buy into your vision.

15 The Law of Victory (Leaders find a way for the team to win)

Victorious leaders have an inability to accept defeat.

16 The Law of the Big Mo (Momentum is a leader’s best friend)

Leaders always find a way to make things happen. With enough momentum nearly any type of change is possible.

17 The Law of Priorities (Leaders understand that activity is not necessarily accomplishment)

Remember the Pareto Principle. To be effective leaders must order their lives according to what is required, what gives the greatest return and what brings the greatest reward. When starting out new with an organisation always re-order its priorities.

18 The Law of Sacrifice (A leader must give up as they go up)

Leadership means setting an example. Leaders often have to sacrifice money, family life and credibility.

19 The Law of Timing (When to lead is as important as what to do and where to go)

The right action at the right time gives success.

20 The Law of Explosive Growth (To add growth, lead followers, to multiply lead leaders)

The key to growth is leadership.

21 The Law of Legacy (A leaders lasting value is measured by succession)

A legacy is created only when a person puts his organisation into a position to do great things without him.

Four critical characteristics of effective leaders(Private communication)

1 Courage (make hard decisions, stick to them)

2 Loyalty (Upwards and downwards, without hesitation)

3 Integrity (In little as well as large things, be above reproach)

4 Knowledge (Know your people, know their fears, dreams & strengths, know your mission)

Quotable quote

“The people are fashioned according to the example of their king and edicts are less powerful than the life (example) of the king”

Claudian, c. 365, Egyptian epic poet

Leaders eat change for breakfast-Key messages to leaders (Comcare,2000)

In introducing change it is important to understand that-

Poor levels of employee adjustment to change can reduce productivity and increase accidents.

Employee adjustment to change is a partnership between the individual and the organisation.

The quality of change leadership and the communication of a clear understanding of the need for change and how change is to be achieved are crucial to the success of the change process.

Supportive leadership behaviours and the quality of an organisation’s people management practice exert considerable influence on employee adjustment to change.

Supportive leaders are approachable, accessible, responsive, understand the problems facing staff and communicate well with employees.

Effective people management practices are characterised by effective delegation, treating people with consideration and respect, encouraging staff to take initiative, actively seeking staff involvement in decisions and showing confidence in their abilities.

Individual responses to change will vary, depending on past experiences, individual capacities and coping styles. Leaders should be prepared to expect a variety of responses to change and be trained to cope with them as they arise.

Schein (1992) relates how leaders embed and transmit change

The most powerful mechanisms for culture embedding and reinforcement are-

What leaders pay attention to, measure and control

Leader reactions to critical incidents and organisational crises

Deliberate role modelling, teaching and coaching by leaders

Criteria for allocation of rewards and status

Criteria for recruitment, selection, promotion, retirement and ex-communication

What leaders pay attention to, measure and control

One of the best mechanisms leaders have for communicating what they believe in or care about is what they pay attention to (What is noticed and commented upon, to what is measured, controlled, rewarded and in other ways systematically dealt with) Even casual remarks and questions that are consistently geared to a certain area can be as potent as formal control mechanisms and measurements. Other powerful signals that subordinates interpret for evidence of the leaders' assumptions are what they observe does not get reacted to.

Leader reactions to critical incidents and crises

When an organisation faces a crisis the manner in which leaders deal with it creates new norms, values and working procedures and reveals important underlying assumptions.

A good time to observe an organisation is when an act of insubordination occurs. No better opportunity exists for leaders to send signals about their own assumptions about human nature and relationships than when they themselves are challenged.

Criteria for recruitment, selection etc

Leaders who are trying to ensure that their values and assumptions will be learned they must create a reward, promotion and status system that is consistent with those assumptions. Whereas the message initially gets across in the daily behaviour of the leader it is judged in the long run by whether the important rewards are allocated consistently with daily behaviour. One of the most subtle ways culture gets embedded is in the initial selection of new members. Basic assumptions are further reinforced through criteria of who does or does not get promoted, who is retired early and who is excommunicated.

Design of physical space, facades, buildings

This category is intended to encompass all the visible features of the organisation that clients, customers, vendors, new employees and visitors would encounter.

Stories about important events and people

As a group develops and accumulates a history, some of this history becomes embodied in stories about events and leadership behaviour. The story reinforces assumptions and teaches assumptions to newcomers. Leaders cannot always control what will be said about them in stories, though they can certainly reinforce stories they feel good about and launch stories that carry the desired messages.

Formal statements about organisational philosophy, values

The formal statement is an attempt by leaders to state explicitly what their values and assumptions are.

Leaders must build trust

Introducing OHS change inevitably upsets the established order in organizations and forces people to question their existing role in the organization. Often people will be asked to do something that is different from the norm and to do that which they do not agree with. Persons introducing and leading OHS change must ensure they are trusted by those they are seeking to join them in the OHS change journey.

Self-disclosure

By letting you know me I allow you to like me. By disclosing yourself to me, I create the potential for trust, caring, commitment, growth, self-understanding and friendship.

If you cannot reveal yourself, you cannot become close to others and you cannot be valued by others for who you are.

Self-Disclosure may be defined as the act of revealing how you are reacting to the present situation and of giving any information that is relevant to an understanding of your reactions to the present.

Self-disclosure does not mean revealing intimate details of your past life. A relationship is built on disclosing your reaction to events you both experience or to what the other person says or does.

Self-disclosure enables others to get to know you. Knowing you better is likely to result in a closer

relationship but learning too much may result in alienation. The amount of self-disclosure you engage in will influence the amount of self-disclosure the other person engages in. Self-disclosure must be relevant to your relationship with the other person and appropriate to the situation you are in.

Trust

Trust is essential for a relationship to grow and develop. In order to build a relationship you must learn to create a climate of trust that reduces your own and the other person's fears of betrayal and rejection and promotes the hope of acceptance, support and confirmation.. There is a risk involved in trusting.

In order to build a relationship, two people must build mutual trust. This is done during a commitment period in which they risk themselves either by disclosing more and more of their thoughts, feelings and reactions to immediate situations and to each other, or by expressing acceptance, support and cooperativeness toward each other. If, when disclosing they do not get the acceptance they need, they may back off from the relationship. If they are accepted, they will continue to risk self-disclosure and continue to develop the relationship. As both people continue to trust and be self-disclosing, the relationship continues to grow

There are three types of behaviour that will decrease trust in a relationship. The first is the use of rejection, ridicule, or disrespect as a response to the others disclosure. The second is the non-reciprocation of self-disclosure. The third type of behaviour that will decrease trust in a relationship is the refusal to disclose your thoughts, feelings, and reactions after the other person has indicated considerable acceptance, support and cooperativeness

The above taken from Johnson D.W. "Reaching Out" (1990) . This text is recommended reading for those involved in safety change.

B Health & Safety Leadership Specifically

International researchers have argued that leadership is one of the most critical determinants of workplace safety performance. Supported by over two decades of research, their findings indicate that leadership plays an integral role in developing and maintaining the safety climate in an organisation (Andreychuk)

BHP Billiton Health & Safety Leadership

In recent years BHP Billiton has adopted a "Zero Harm" philosophy in OHS and the following vision is communicated.-

The safety of our people is a value which is not compromised

Safety excellence is recognised as good business

Leaders at all levels are safety role models

Effective safety leadership is a prerequisite for promotion

People are aware of the hazards and risks in their workplace and act accordingly

Compliance with safety standards and procedures is absolute

At risk behaviours are not acceptable and are addressed when observed

Effective skills to lead and work safely are developed through ongoing training and mentoring

Repeat incidents are evidence of an out of control operation

Benchmark Study on Safety Leadership

Over a 14 month period in 1994 -5 BHP Minerals carried out an extensive international safety benchmarking exercise with "best in safety class" companies throughout the world.

25 locations throughout the world participated in the study. An approximate 100 page report on findings is available should anyone wish to refer to it

The following were recurring themes in the world's best safety performers.

1. Executive management provides the impetus for safety performance. This means that senior management is not only committed to and supports safety, but that it insists on safety performance in a manner that is clearly understood and echoed at all levels.

2. Management focus is a key to quality safety performance.

***1 & 2 above were seen as key factors**

3. Existence of a company-wide framework or systematic, standardised approach to safety. The approach has performance standards that receive regular internal and external audits

4. Objectives are set and organisations work towards set targets for implementation of the objectives.

5. Safety personnel report in at the highest level in the organisations. They have mainly an advisory function. Management and supervision drives the safety programme not the safety personnel.

6 Effective safety training targeted to identified needs at all levels. Induction training and detailed safety training for supervisors and managers was high on the priority list.

Regular safety meetings were seen as important.

7 Active personal involvement of senior management personnel in the safety programme

8 Safety is considered in performance evaluations of all staff

9 Regular, detailed audits of the safety management system

10 Formal approaches to hazard identification and risk analysis, employees were fully involved in this

11 Formal emergency response procedures that were practiced and audited

12 The best in class addressed contractor safety before contractors were allowed on site, they pre-qualified them based on safety and made safety performance a contract condition. Contractors were expected to perform at the same safety level as permanent employees

13 High on the list of the ways the best in class built safety awareness were management participation and leadership, dissemination of information, safety meetings and rewards or recognition of performance

14 Safety is a condition of employment and dismissals occur for non-performance

15 Well-managed rehabilitation programmes are in place

16 The best in class use medical examinations and testing to ensure fitness for duty

17 There were Employee Assistance Programmes in place

18 There were off the job safety programmes

19 There was an emphasis on vehicle / plant maintenance and driver / operator training programmes.

20 There were extensive personal protective equipment training, maintenance and audit programmes

21 Lock-out procedures were used instead of tag-out

22 Best in class managers and supervisors respond positively to safety issues that are raised

23 Best in class supervisors are responsible for safety auditing, investigating accidents, planned job observations and training

24 All levels in the organisation make decisions that reflect the philosophy "Safety first-Production will follow"

It is suggested Safety Management Systems be designed around these benchmarking findings.

Superior leadership, the key to safety

"But in the midst of this turnaround, although we were much improved on safety, we were still having a few lost time accidents. I wanted zero so I decided to give the order that any person could stop any job at any time for safety and that the job would not be re-started until that person was satisfied with the fix. This gave the union personnel the power to make it safe and then they would have no excuse for accidents. Well, the results were nothing short of fantastic.

In a period of 8 months we had stopped all lost time accidents and rarely thereafter even had minor ones. Success and everybody loved it. Convince people that you are serious about safety and they will respond.

My leadership strategy was a very important key to safety, productivity et al. Superior leadership is a strategy to inspire people to do more, dream more and learn more.

Values are the centerpiece of this strategy because employees respect actions which reflect high standards of all good values like industry, fairness, forthrightness, compassion, honesty etc while they disrespect actions reflecting low or negative standards. Actions reflecting high standards strongly influence employees towards emulating those standards, but the same emulation occurs for actions reflecting low standards.

Listening is the most important leadership skill of this strategy because people cannot be motivated or committed to something if they cannot “put in their 2 cents worth”, when they want and how they want, or if they cannot understand and be in on the decision process which affects them. Of such things is TRUST built”

Simonton B., Simonton Associates

Forming a relationship as a Leader

“Leadership is a reciprocal relationship between those who choose to lead and those who decide to follow” (Greer,2001)

Krause (2004) speaks of nine factors that predict positive safety outcomes

1 Procedural justice

Does the individual perceive that the supervisor’s decision-making process to be fair?

2 Leader member exchange

If employees believe the supervisor will provide support and look out for their interests positive results will be found

3 Management credibility

Do employees perceive that what management says is consistent with what it does?

4 Perceived organizational support

Do employees perceive that they receive the support they need to accomplish the organisation’s objectives?

5 Workgroup relations

Do coworkers treat each other with respect, listen to each others ideas, help one another out and fulfill commitments?

6 Teamwork

To what extent do employees perceive that working with team members is an effective way to complete tasks?

7 Organisational value for safety performance improvement

The more employees perceive that the organization values safety goals, the more willing they will be to invest in those goals themselves.

8 Upward communication

Can the workers speak freely to their supervisor about safety concerns?

9 Approaching others

Do employees feel free to speak to each other about safety concerns?

Leading safety excellence-One company’s perspective

J.E.Jacobs Engineering and Constructors (2004) maintain the characteristics of successful leaders are

Establishing a vision, missions or goals

Communicating in a way that inspires

Making followers feel part of something important and satisfying

A good leader uses positive re-inforcement because it is found most people repeat behaviour that results in positive consequences. Positive re-inforcement has also proved to be the best way to maintain existing good behaviour. Positive re-inforcement may consist of verbal acknowledgement, public praise and material awards. It may be immediate, during meetings, after giving a suggestion and when performing well.

J.E.Jacobs Engineering and Constructors also quote General Norman Schwartzkopf “To be a 21st century leader you must have the competence and character to win and keep the trust of others”

How to be a safety leader

The author is grateful to Dave Cowley of HP Hood LLC, Chelsea , MA 02150 (October 2000)for sharing the company tip card.

Five tips on how to be a Safety Leader

1 Walk the Talk-Visibly demonstrate safety by your actions, practice what you preach, wear proper protective equipment, employees look to you for example

2 Give Recognition-When you see an employee doing a job safely praise them for it, reward safety every change you get

3 Report All Incidents-Report all incidents no matter how slight, emphasise it is vital to be on the look-out for near-misses, minor mishaps and close calls instead of waiting for an actual injury to occur

4 Follow-Up-If a safety concern has been raised, always perform follow-up and provide feed-back to the employee

5 Ask Questions-Are employees using equipment that has been inspected(hand tools, forklifts, motor vehicles etc.)

The role of leaders in safety change

For about a year this author worked with a General Manager Operations who could best be described as a charismatic leader who had an overriding commitment to safety This individual would turn up at operating sites in the middle of the night to see how safety was being managed. He would jump on a haultruck and go with the operator while the truck was loaded, the manager would question the operators about safety and tell them that he expected safety to be their top priority. This manager let his subordinates know he expected nothing less than 100% commitment to safety, those who did not comply were not around long. Word quickly got around about the managers safety expectations, single-handly he raised the profile of safety in the organisation.

Krause (2004) describes what excellent safety leadership looks like

1 Vision

The most senior executive must “see” what safety excellence looks like. The leader must convey his vision in a compelling manner through action.

2 Credibility

When an excellent safety leader says something others believe it and do not question his motives.

3 Collaboration

Collaboration encompasses working well with others encouraging input, helping others, expressing confidence in others support others decisions and gaining commitment.

4 Feedback & Recognition

An excellent safety leader provides effective feedback and recognises people for their accomplishments.

5 Accountability

An excellent safety leader gives workers a fair appraisal of safety efforts and results, clearly communicates peoples roles in safety and fosters the sense that people are responsible for the level of safety in their organisational unit.

6 Communication

As a great communicator the leader encourages people to deliver honest, complete information about safety (even if unfavourable) keeps people informed and communicates frequently and effectively up, down and across the organisation.

7 Values safety

An excellent safety leader acts to support safety values and principles. He leads by example and clearly communicates that safe behaviour is expected.

8 Action-oriented

An excellent safety leader is proactive rather than reactive in addressing safety issues. He gives timely, considered responses to safety concerns, demonstrates a sense of personal energy and urgency to achieve safety results and demonstrates a performance driven focus by delivering results with speed and excellence.

Emerging challenges in safety leadership

Having an individual who is a great safety leader is one thing, maintaining that leadership after that individual leaves the organisation is another thing. Good leaders develop other leaders who can carry on their work.

Much is spoken about developing leadership, an equal amount of effort must be expended on developing "followship".

Other references

Readers are particularly directed to the paper "Leadership Principles for The Safety Professional" presented by Eddie Greer at the A.S.S.E. Professional Development Conference, June 13, 2001, Anaheim, California.

During peer-review of this paper the author was made aware of the A.S.S.E. paper "Dimensions of supervisor effectiveness" by Jim Spigener, 25/6/04. This paper is considered particularly useful on the topic of safety leadership, there are some limitation in use associated with this paper and potential readers are directed to www.bstsolutions.com

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Recommended reading on Leadership

Understanding teams-Welbourn M.

Groups-Theory & Experience-Gersherfeld N.

Leadership-An Australian Focus-Dubrin J. & Dalgligh C.

Leadership-Burns J.

Leadership Revelations-An Australian Perspective-Henry A.

Leadership-A Communications Perspective-Hackman M. & Johnson C.

Leadership Lessons from West Point-Crandall D.

A Leaders Legacy-Kouzes & Posner

Organisation Culture & Leadership-Schein E.

Leadership-Giuliani R.

Developing the Leaders Within You-Maxwell J.

Patton On Leadership-Axelrod A.

In Extremis Leadership-Kolditz T.

The Leadership Challenge-Kouzes & Posner

Portrait of a Leader-Peter Cosgrove

C.D. 's from the Australian Institute of Management

Understanding Integrated Leadership-Hede A.

Developing the Art of Leadership-Perry K.

Leading With Integrity-Thorsborne M.

Becoming a Transformational Leader-Perry K.