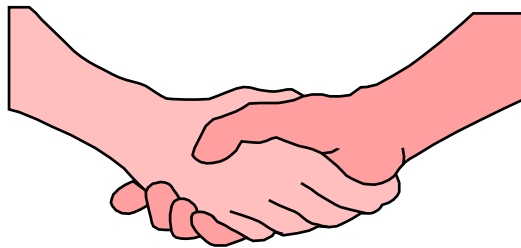


INITIATING CHANGE

- When initiating change remember “People support what they create”



"A health & safety problem can be described by statistics but cannot be understood by statistics. It can only be understood by knowing and feeling the pain, anguish, and depression and shattered hopes of the victim and of wives, husbands, parents, children, grandparents and friends, and the hope, struggle and triumph of recovery and rehabilitation in a world often unsympathetic, ignorant, unfriendly and unsupportive, only those with close experience of life altering personal damage have this understanding"

Thanks to all of you who responded to my posts on zero harm. I suspect I am pushing a dead duck with this for a lot of people but I am not easily deterred. Many years ago when I was in the Australian Regular Army I was told “If you stick your head out of the trenches you will attract some gunfire” I have been reminded of that recently.

Between Canada & Australia I have received about 40 posts and e-mails about my comments on zero harm. I must say I found it all interesting and useful, shows the power of these discussion forums. I would encourage Canadians to log onto the Safety Institute of Australia forum, you will find it is not as active as yours, maybe you can help to change that. I think the Canadian forum is excellent and has a few features the Australian one does not have. There are some Australians who participate and I am sure my fellow Australians will find it worthwhile.

I was pretty strong against zero harm when I started this process but tried to keep an open mind. I was hoping for some high quality arguments for zero harm. Having heard the arguments for & against I have firmed in my view against zero harm. I have attempted to explain why in the following. For me it is a matter of focus.

I thought I would stir up a hornets nest with my comments and I did, reading between the lines there may have been a couple of people annoyed with me for having the audacity to question the

holy grail. I would estimate two-fifths of those who replied were against zero harm. The rest were for zero harm, some very strongly. Interestingly there was no explanation from those in favour of zero harm on how it would make a difference in the real world.

To a certain extent the responses have revealed the respondents core beliefs about safety and how people are damaged at work, I would suggest some of these beliefs can benefit from being challenged.

Zero harm is warm, fuzzy stuff with an emotional appeal, the trouble with emotional appeal is it sometimes prevents logical analysis. There was no shortage of emotion from some of those who replied in support of zero harm. Zero harm looks good on the company's annual report and at speeches to Rotary and / or Lions the managers will swell with pride as they tell their mates about their caring approach. The safety so-called profession has a history of emotionally appealing approaches that have proved to be distractions from the main purpose and unhelpful. It is not unusual for people to pick up and run with the latest fad without carefully evaluating it.

A number of replies questioned zero harm like me and a number of people are quite keen on the concept.

Some people say zero harm is a fallacy and the goals are impossible or unachievable and there is far too much focus on minor injuries to the detriment of the serious side of town.

Others are keen on the concept, say the target is good because it stretches them and looking after the little things will fix the big things.

One Canadian said we should get away from using "accident" measures altogether as they are a negative measure. He proposes measuring "The presence of safety" instead, I thought that was an idea with some potential. Another Canadian said the trouble with zero harm is you spend more time classifying incidents than developing controls for them. Another Canadian said targets must be realistic and achievable.

One respondent said this argument is about semantics. The safety movement is full of unscientific, emotive and mis-directing terminology, the terms accident & cause being the prime examples. Rather than semantics the zero harm argument is about a serious mis-direction of safety effort.

I rang a number of my contacts about zero harm and probably got a 50% for and 50% against response. An ex-manager of mine who has a way with words has strong views against zero harm but his comments would offend some people ,so I will not repeat them publically.

I think my major objection to zero harm is it does not target attention, effort and limited resources on the serious injuries where you get the biggest bang for your buck. Of course you are also kidding yourself if you think you can actually achieve zero harm. There are some arguments that a certain amount of risk is a good thing in everything we do. If zero harm were achievable it would financially ruin organisations. Goals must be realistic and not only admirable.

How you perceive zero harm probably revolves around what you believe the dependencies are between minor and serious personal damage.

Starting from the birth of the industrial safety movement in America in the 1920's we have been fed a solid diet of "Accident Ratio Studies" by various researchers. The numbers differ from one researcher to the next and in different industries(in other words it is inconsistent) but the central theme of the argument is that for every serious injury there will have been x less serious injuries and y minor injuries beforehand. From this work the belief has been developed that if you stop the minor injuries you will automatically stop the major ones. I was trained in this approach when I first started in safety, I now realise this approach does not accord with my personal association with personal damage occurrences in most of my 35 year safety career. These studies are fine for statistical description but I believe they are weak on statistical inference. There will be occasions when the belief above is proved correct but I would suggest this is in the minority. We should learn from these occurrences.

Australian safety researcher Geoff McDonald has a system of classifying personal damage occurrences ("Accidents ") that goes something like this-

Class 1-Permanently alters the future of the individual

Class 2-Temporarily alters the future of the individual

Class 3 –Inconveniences the individual

Geoff has investigated many thousand Class 1 damage occurrences in his career and maintains the most effective way to make meaningful progress in safety is by focusing on the class 1 phenomena. Geoff has a view that many of the things that are traditionally done in safety programs are "displacement activities", a displacement activity is something we do, put a lot of energy into but at the end of the day there is little logical reason to do it. My safety career has seen no shortage of displacement activities. Given Geoff's immersion in serious personal damage I believe he brings a unique perspective and knowledge of what works and does not work in safety and I value his opinion. Geoff is very dismissive of zero harm. He also has some strong views about the inadequacy of risk assessment but I will leave that to another time.

In my 35 years in safety I have dealt with the aftermath of 13 Class 1 Fatal and 2 Class 1 Non-Fatal events none of which could have been predicted by prior minor "accident experience" (A properly developed program of critical incident recall (Refer to the paper Practical Application of the Critical Incident Recall Technique on my web-site ohschange.com.au, this ended up being an awesome bit of work and my paper probably under sells the process) would have given some insight into some of the occurrences.) Most Class 1 damage is a totally different beast than the other 2 classifications, the energy levels are much higher if nothing else. Class 1 damage reduction requires a different approach than the other classes, tools like the taxonomy and critical incident recall are of value. Having been involved in a taxonomy of the Qld. mining industry's personal damage experience I am familiar with the advantages of this approach. I am developing a description of the taxonomy process and it will be available on request in a week or so. It is incredibly simple but quite effective.

A study into Australia's personal damage experience by the Productivity Council said 13% of occurrences were Class 1 with 82% of the damage.

Zero Class 1 damage is the approach I would take in order to target our efforts and limited resources

in the most productive area.