Safety misCommunication

How to create a positive, sustainable safety culture

James E. Tarpinian MS, CHP
Tarpinian Consulting Services

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Who We Are

EHS Services and Solutions

• Founded in 1990, we provide a comprehensive range of strategic, management and technical consulting solutions.
• Our consultants can design and implement environmental, health, safety and sustainability programs for organizations of all sizes in all industries.

About BSI

• British Standards Institution, est. 1901
• Developing standards to
  • improve performance
  • reduce risk
  • achieve sustainable growth
• 72,000 customers in 150 countries
EHS Services and Solutions - **Key Service Areas**

- Industrial Hygiene
- Safety
- Environmental Compliance & Engineering
- Ergonomics (Office/Lab/Mfg)
- EHS Training
- Asbestos/Lead Assessment and Monitoring

- EHS and Sustainability Outsourcing/Shared Services
- Process Safety
- Construction EHS

- EHS Auditing / Prioritization of Issues (POI)
- Management Systems
- Corporate Sustainability
- Responsible Supply Chain
- Business Continuity Planning
About the Presenter

James E. Tarpinian, MS, CHP  
Tarpinian Consulting Services

• Owner and Principal Consultant at Tarpinian Consulting Services

• Previously served in executive-level ESH&Q positions for the SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory at Stanford University, Battelle Memorial Institute, Brookhaven National Laboratory, and Bechtel

• Active in professional organizations including leadership positions in the American Board of Health Physics, American Academy of Health Physics, and the Health Physics Society

• Recipient of Elda Anderson Award, William McAdams service award, Joyce P. Davis memorial award and the Fellow Award from the Health Physics Society
What we are going to talk about today

• Why this is important
• Good intentions are not good enough
• How to avoid the “sound byte” trap
• First steps for building a safety culture
• How to avoid drama in the workplace
Communication is Multidimensional

When we try to communicate about safety we must be mindful of the difference between
what we say,
what we really mean, and
what our audience actually hears
What we say:
“*Our goal is zero accidents*”

What we mean:
“*We don’t want anyone to get hurt*”

What they hear:
“*We don’t want you to make mistakes*”
What we say:
“Safety is a condition of employment”

What we mean:
“We have rules to keep everyone safe and we expect you to follow them”

What they hear:
“If you get hurt you will be fired”
Worker Exits Vehicle While it is Running

Root cause: Management’s expectations related to a driver exiting a vehicle were not clearly documented and consistently communicated to all levels of employees.
A Word About Discipline

• Whenever safety and disciplinary processes are discussed together the message turns fearful (e.g. “Safety is a condition of employment”)

• However, discipline should be considered for intentional violations or when there is significant potential for harm

• The rules should be clear and well understood

• How we manage human error is critical to creating a “Just Culture”
What we say:  
“*We hold people accountable*”

What we mean:  
“*We want ownership for fixing the problem*”

What they hear:  
“*We punish people for making mistakes*”
Contractor Damages 24” Transite Cooling Water Pipe During Soil Excavation

Root cause: Failure to implement proper work planning

Contributing cause: Oversight less than adequate
My definition of “Accountability”: Owning and fixing the problem

Taking ownership means being responsible for:

1. Response
2. Recovery
3. Lessons learned

Management’s reaction to mistakes is key to creating a “learning culture”
What we say:

“Safety is everyone’s responsibility”

What we mean:

“Safety is a shared responsibility”

What they hear:

“If everyone is responsible, then no one is responsible”
What we say:
   “Safety is our number one priority”
What we mean:
   “We build safety into everything we do”
What they hear:
   “We don’t really mean it”
## In Review....

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Do you have any other examples like this?

Please submit them and we will review them at the end of this webinar.
A fundamental key to excellence in safety communications is Leadership…

...what we do speaks much more loudly than what we say.
What leaders do (and we are all leaders)

• As leaders we must state and reinforce our expectations
• To build trust we must do what we say, say what we mean
• Don't rely on "safety sound bytes"
• Encourage and recognize people for demonstrating ownership for safety
A Sound Byte That Works

We don't want safe employees...

...we want safe PEOPLE!
Safety Culture Components*

*Based on Reason (1997) The Components of Safety Culture: Definitions of Informed, Reporting, Just, Flexible and Learning Cultures
Obstacles to a “Just Culture”

• “Just” means different things to different people
• Implies that we believe the workplace can be made to be consistently fair (i.e. a noble goal but unrealistic)
• Many managers believe they already have it
Where to Start: “Learning Culture”

- Easier to integrate the message into the workplace culture than “Just Culture”
- Views accidents and errors as providing opportunities to learn rather than providing opportunities to punish
- Appeals to creativity and problem solving skills

First steps must be to create a “reporting culture” of openness and healthy self criticism in order to build trust
Fear Drives Reporting Underground

DOE OCCURANCE REPORTS

- 1990: 2
- 1991: 6
- 1992: 7
- 1993: 5
- 1994: 10
- 1995: 15
- 1996: 2
- 1997: 1
- 1998: 1
- 1999: 1
- 2000: 2
- 2001: 2
- 2002: 1
- 2003: 1
- 2004: 1
- 2005: 11
- 2006: 4
Obstacles to a “Reporting Culture”

- Our culture is not naturally self-critical
- Reporting of events is not the default
- People don’t want the attention
- Fear of being shut down
- Fear of losing control
- Worry about being “second guessed”
- We punish people for doing the right things
- We reward people for doing the wrong things
- We engage in the “drama triangle” stifling problem solving, proactivity, and creativity
What other obstacles are there to creating a Reporting Culture?

Please submit them and we will review them at the end of this webinar.
Drama Triangle*

Persecutor

Drama

Victim

Rescuer

*Tools for Conscious Leadership & Responsibility, Dan Miller & Associates
Drama Triangle

Some examples:

“That guy should have known better”

“Training/procedure inadequate”

“Its not our fault - Safety stopped the job”

“Don’t worry about your deadline – I will take care of it”
Achieving a Reporting Culture

Leaders must state and reinforce their expectations for reporting events and conditions

• Create an atmosphere that values reporting
• Treat mistakes as opportunities to learn, not opportunities to blame and punish
• Create and publish leading metrics for identifying and reporting events
• Celebrate and reward “stop work” actions and self reporting
How do we change the culture?

A fundamental key to excellence in safety performance is…..

…everyone takes their full share of responsibility – no more and no less.
“Don’t get mad – get curious”

When something goes wrong (or when you discover a mistake)

- Stay out of the Drama Triangle
- Ask why they thought it was okay at the time
- Find out how much is owned by the organization vs the individual
- Own your part of the problem
## How to avoid the Drama Triangle

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<td>Get mad</td>
<td>Get curious</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immediately seek solutions</td>
<td>Define the problem in terms of the organizational needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rush to judgment</td>
<td>Consider all possible points of view</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jump to conclusions</td>
<td>Stay objective</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ascribe motive</td>
<td>Believe people are trying to act in what they think is the best interest of the organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inject speculation</td>
<td>Only report the facts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seek to place blame</td>
<td>Seek to understand why they thought it was okay at the time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ask why until you find a “who”</td>
<td>Do a root cause analysis: Ask why five times (or more) to discover organizational weaknesses.</td>
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Key Messages

• Safety is a shared responsibility and everyone must do his or her part
• We cannot eliminate all mistakes - our goal is to reduce their frequency and severity
• In order to learn from our errors we must encourage and reward open reporting
• Work to establish trust
• Don’t punish people for making honest mistakes
• Don’t rely on “safety sound bytes”
• Do what you say, say what you mean
Key References

“Tools for Conscious Leadership & Responsibility,”

“Managing the Risks of Organizational Accidents,”
James Reason

“Roadmap to a Just Culture: Enhancing the Safety Environment,” Global Aviation Information Network,
Questions?

Submit using the Questions box in the webinar control panel.

A link to the webinar recording and slides will be sent to all attendees.

Please help us by completing the short webinar evaluation sent to you after today’s event.
Contact

Mark Tipperreiter
BSI EHS Services and Solutions
mark.tipperreiter@bsigroup.com
+1 503 840 2991
bsigroup.com/ehs

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