It's the Culture, Stupid

There's wide agreement that changing organisational culture is the key to achieving long-term safety success. But how far down the track is your organisation? DON ECKENFELDER offers a challenging checklist to measure progress.

Everyone who has spent any time at all trying to protect people, property and the environment has realised - more than once - that attitude is at the core of what predicts results, good or bad. The corporate attitude or culture is the barometer that will predict the "weather" - the incidence rate, the workers compensation "mod factor", the "safety" performance.

James Carville is widely recognised as the strategist who fashioned ***President Clinton***'s victory in 1992. His bulletin on the wall of the campaign headquarters which read "It's the *economy*, stupid," is widely credited with being the rallying call that touched the consciousness of the American public and inspired enough of them to vote for Governor Clinton that we now call him President.

A dissenting voice has come from the Lyndon Johnson speechwriter ***Ben J. Wattenberg*** in his book *Values Matter Most*. I have morphed the Carville bulletin for my title but will argue that over the long term, Wattenberg is more on target. He writes that the solution to losses is tied up in beliefs, values, culture and attitudes - not behaviours and outcomes (eg: the economy). When we get to them, the battle is usually already won or lost.

THIS IS A TRIP THAT PEOPLE WHO WANT BETTER SAFETY PERFORMANCE MUST EVENTUALLY TAKE.

CHANGING CULTURE THE KEY

What this means for the average safety professional is that the key to long-term success is tied up in changing the culture of the organisation as it relates to loss prevention. Is that possible? If it is not, we're spending a lot of time and effort setting ourselves up for defeat. Will it be hard? Of course. Anything worth doing is usually hard. Will it take a long time? Sure it will. Finally, is it worth the trip? Remember, the fun is usually in the trip and not in the arrival. This is a trip that people who want better safety performance must eventually take. The only question is whether they will be Shanghaied or plan and control the trip themselves; do it at the time and in the way they want or be swept along by people and events they do not control.

Even the behaviour-based advocates admit that the goal is to change attitudes. They suggest that changing behaviours will eventually change attitudes. That probably will happen, but I question how deep the change will run. Instead, we ought to go right to the source of attitudes (beliefs and values) and work on that. Of course, we need to work on the damaging behaviours at the same time. But the long-term solutions will be unalterably tied to our ability to affect values.

ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE

The philosophy behind the thinking is based on the biblical counsel, "For where your

Limitations of OSHA, Traditional safety and Behaviour-based safety

OSHA*
- accident rate reduction is inconclusive.
- has left a wake of frustrated administrators.
- is government, and government is rarely more effective than the private sector.
- has little impact on culture, which we all know is where the action is.
- does not have a history of attracting the best safety and health people.
- uses the wrong driver - compliance statistics.
- mostly works through fear.

TRADITIONAL SAFETY
- is based on a 30 to 50 year old model.
- is predominantly fear-driven.
- uses audits that mimic the regulatory process.
- is culture-blind and insensitive.
- measurement is after-the-fact.
- punishes creativity.
- institutionalises bad ideas.

BEHAVIOUR-BASED SAFETY
- has become myopic.
- lets management off the hook.
- may eventually be seen as manipulative.
- stifles initiative in subtle ways.
- fails to deal with real root causes.
- provides a poor return on investment.
- lacks the power to be self-sustaining.

** OSHA refers to the US equivalent of New Zealand's OSH service. This section of the table does not necessarily apply in the New Zealand context but is included for completeness.*

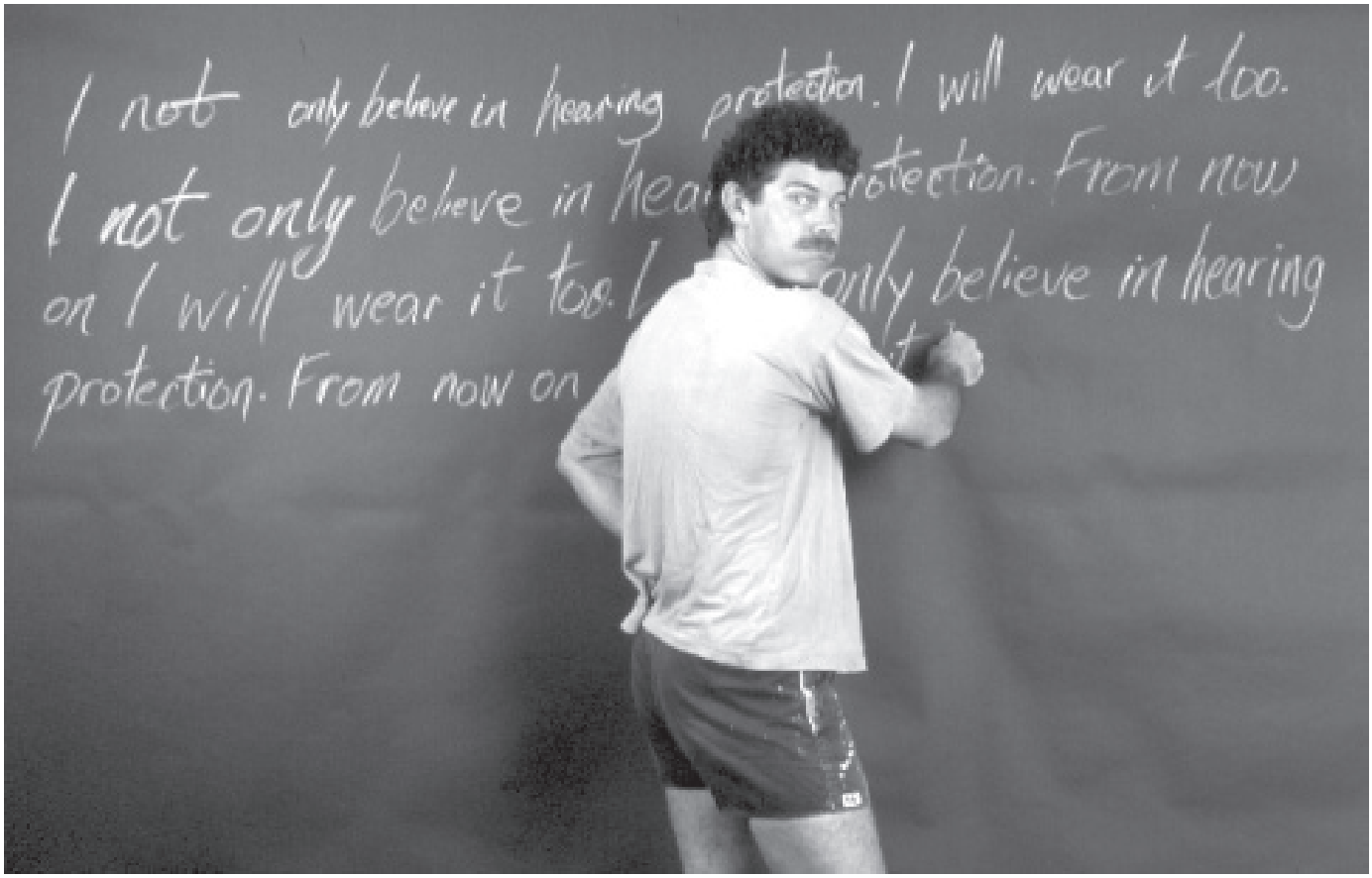

Photo: Terry Barnett

treasure is there will your heart be also"; the proverb, "Your actions are a moving picture of what you believe" as well as the words of the immortal philosopher Peter Pan: "Anything is possible if you believe hard enough." Other scripture substitutes desire for beliefs and values; values do spawn desire. Here is an example:

"You are what your deep, driving desire is.
As your desire is, so is your will.
As you will is, so is your deed.
As your deed is, so is your destiny."
-Bridadaranyaka Upanishad IV 4.5

I depict the keystone concept in this thought process in the simple pictogram that follows:

Beliefs ∏ Values ∏
Culture ∏ Attitudes ∏
Behaviours ∏ Actions ∏
Incidents (Outcomes)

This thinking and all that flows from it has been described by ***Craig Bennett***, the corporate director of safety and loss prevention for ***Hasbro Inc***, as "a template for any existing program, process or system that you wish to improve."

What's wrong with what you are doing? I don't know but you probably do. Your biggest dilemma is probably trying to figure out how to tell management about the problem. Value-Inspired Resource Optimizaton (VIRO) may be the answer.

Before suggesting how VIRO works, let me suggest possibilities of what is wrong with most organisations' approaches. The prominent drivers for most safety efforts in organisations that have given the subject serious consideration are regulatory compliance, so-called traditional safety programmes, and behaviour-based safety in one form or another. The table on page 18 outlines what typically goes wrong with those approaches.

COMPARE LEVELS OF MATURITY

In order to diagnose potential problems in any of these suggested areas, it would be handy to have a test and an apparatus to administer it. A tool to establish group values and describe maturity levels, then check the organisation against those values would do the job. I refer to the maturity levels as "descriptor-predictors" because they describe the current cultural climate and in so doing predict the outcomes that the evaluated organisation should expect based on the premise that beliefs and values have consequences.

The best results will come if customised values are developed for every individual organisation, just as every organisation should have its own mission statement. Unfortunately, this will be a little harder than writing a mission statement. But it will be more rewarding and ultimately much more useful.

Look over the example maturity grid on the next page. This could either serve as a model for you to develop your own or a sample to be tried. I suggest sending the grid to about 20 people and asking them to evaluate the organisation (as they see it through their superior or superiors) by circling the box that best describes the maturity of each value as they perceive it. This effort can and should be totally anonymous. You are trying to determine organisation culture or norms, not individual idiosyncracies. Compile the results, send them to the participants and give them to your boss and any other leader or leaders who have or should have an interest in loss prevention and what you do. This should

I NEVER SAID IT WOULD BE EASY; I JUST SAID IT WOULD BE WORTH IT.

SAFETY VALUE	0: DARKNESS IGNORANCE	1: DAWN ENTRY LEVEL	2: MID MORNING NOVICE
1. Do it for the right reasons	Safety driven by regulation, management directives and cost of accidents.	Concern for people occasionally mentioned but not backed up with actions. Employees don't believe it.	Flashes of real concern for people occur, but cynicism is ever present.
2. See it as part of the whole	Safety is handled independently of the rest of the management process.	Safety is occasionally considered at staff meetings and during appraisals.	Efforts have been made to integrate safety, but they have been token and often failed.
3. Recognise there is no end	Safety is managed by reaction and quick fixes.	Root cause determination and prevention efforts occur but are the exception.	Awareness that loss prevention is hard and ongoing is occasionally seen.
4. First, it is a people business; things are a distant second	Safety is keynoted by inspection and compliance.	Employees have some feeling of involvement in the safety process but don't exhibit any sense of ownership.	Employees are beginning to have a sense of ownership for the safety process that goes beyond participation.
5. Put the right person in charge	No emphasis is placed on who supervises safety or on the qualifications of safety practitioners.	Token efforts are evident concerning safety staffing, but they have not been very effective.	Safety parity is a goal but is clearly not yet a reality. Everyone knows safety is often the first thing to be cut.
6. Use a yardstick everyone can read	Safety performance measurement is not understood and is rarely discussed at serious business meetings.	Safety measurement is mentioned but with little conviction and without substantive responses.	Awareness of safety measurement is growing and at times elicits responses.
7. Sell benefits - and they are many	Everyone talks about the burdens of safety. Benefits are rarely discussed or appreciated.	Occasionally someone points out the virtues of safety, but it is the exception instead of the rule.	Safety is sold in company organs and at some meetings, but it is not integrated and response is casual.
8. Never settle for second best	Safety is last when it comes to allocating funds and the first to be cut during times of austerity.	At times, safety achieves parity with other considerations, but it is the exception, not the rule.	There is "safety first" talk and posters, but it is often not supported.
9. Be guided by logic, not emotion	The only way to get action on a safety item is to get emotional.	Safety is said to be part of the management process but is driven differently. Action usually stems from accidents or complaints.	Management is transitioning to act and not react and look for root causes, but old habits persist.
10. Empower others rather than seek after support	If the safety professional doesn't do it, it doesn't get done.	The safety professional plays a dominant role and delegates reluctantly.	Empowerment is starting, but in the absence of the safety advocate, the process loses momentum quickly.

VIRO MATURITY GRID

3: LATE MORNING MEDIOCRITY	4: NOON EXCELLENCE	5: FULL LIGHT PERFECTION
Concern for people is balanced with compliance and injury costs but is seen as a separate subject.	Concern for people is major safety driver but not in real harmony with other goals.	Sincere concern for employees drives safety and is in perfect harmony with other activities.
Safety has parity with other staff functions, and management has a vision of how it should be integrated.	A plan to totally integrate safety exists. Independent safety discussions are becoming less frequent.	Loss prevention is totally integrated and accepted as essential for business success.
Management is initiating efforts that are self-perpetuating. Evidence of a long-term commitment to safety appears at times.	Critical behaviours and conditions are being defined and measured. A long-term commitment is evident.	Everyone recognises that safety excellence is never-ending, like the Shewart Cycle.
Focus is on employee involvement. Culture and attitudes are more important than physical defects.	A well-developed process for measuring and monitoring behaviours exists. The organisation is moving toward deeper understanding.	The focus is on beliefs, values and culture. It drives all other efforts and is correlated with all other measures.
Reporting relationships are good and safety staff are generally well-qualified and have adequate resources.	An effective top executive supervises safety. There are sufficient safety professionals and they are almost all highly qualified.	Only the best people are placed in safety positions. Their leader is an influential executive who goes to bat for safety.
Safety measurement is good but largely retrospective. There are responses but rarely targeted with predictable results.	Measurement of safety is clear and generally understood. It is moving toward being more predictive than reactive.	Safety measurement is prospective, positive and credible. It is an effective tool that correlates with all that matters in the organisation.
The benefits of loss prevention are often touted - at times with conviction. But it is not fully integrated and comes in waves.	The selling of safety is consistent and integrated. Employee involvement is built in. Talking safety is encouraged.	Talking safety benefits is inherent in the organisational culture. It is fully integrated. Everyone is aware of the benefits.
Safety normally has parity with other considerations but at times it is clear that there are higher priorities.	Loss prevention is considered essential to business success. Safety professionals are considered equals with other staff.	Safety is viewed as a profit centre, not as overhead. Safety professionals are viewed as valuable organisation assets.
Loss prevention is driven by process. Appeals to emotion still interfere more often than they should.	Emotion rarely affects safety decision-making. But, occasionally, pressure will prevail over prescience.	Management refuses to react to anomalies. They have complete confidence in their process and stick to it tenaciously.
The organisation understands the correct role of the safety professional but frequently reverts to dependent behaviour.	The safety professionals are working themselves out of a job. They are secure with their empowerment strategy and implementation.	Dependency on the safety professional has been shed. The function is used to optimise performance. The safety professional likes it that way.

trigger off a lively and introspective discussion. Although the grids are copyrighted, I will give each of the readers of this article permission to make 20 copies of the grids and use them as I have described or in any other way they want.

Caution: As I mentioned earlier in this article, changing beliefs and values is a hard and long job. It will require executives to model correct behaviours; setting out the correct precepts, routine training and education, as well as rituals and reminders that keep the desired values and beliefs and resultant culture, attitudes and behaviours in the forefront. Many organisations just aren't ready for this type of approach. The best candidates will be those who have succeeded at introducing self-directed work groups, not any easy process. Remember, I never said it would be easy; I just said it would be worth it. Using the maturity grid for an initial survey is just the first step in what could evolve into a "trip around the world."

BUT DO I HAVE THE POWER?

Don't you need stature to change a culture? I say no. Many of the people who have had the most profound effect on cultures have had no official position, stature, resources or recognition. Look at religious leaders like Moses, Paul, Jesus Christ and Mohammed. Look at social transformational leaders such as Gandhi, Dr Martin Luther King and Jesse Jackson. The list is almost endless. If you have a good idea and are steadfast, that's about all that is required. Values-driven safety is a good idea. Try it.

Early in the development of this concept, my wife asked where the concept had been successfully applied. I answered everywhere and nowhere. It is applied every day in life; people can predict the outcomes in their lives by what they believe in. There has not been significant application of these concepts in industry. At least, not yet.

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