

SH&E process improvement “Kaizen” often needs to be built on a “back to basics” platform

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Addressing the total cost of risk, work exertion safety can be integrated with human sustainability and productivity to bring about breakthrough performance:

“Hot” topics these days across the Internet and in global industry include “process improvement”, “Six Sigma”, “the difference between Quality Assurance and Quality Control”, “ISO standards” and so on. What is common with all of them is a singular focus on process. And process presupposes the human element, especially when you consider the notion of “continuous improvement”.

Human beings must be fully engaged for any process to change for the better, and for those changes to have a positive effect on the bottom line. It is not simply a matter of a person with a clipboard checking off what was done right and what went wrong. A robot can inspect things for defects. Engaged employees need to think about not just what went wrong but why and when and how.

Process improvement for certain fundamental industries must be implemented by the workforce across the organization's culture and with the involvement and support of leadership. It is thus folded into an organization from the bottom up and the top down. The experience of work exertion must be self-strengthening with a goal of influencing outcomes not only for self-safety but also for productivity, company growth and ultimately employee sustainability as human capital.

People need to sense what a process feels like when it is going right and imprint the "rightness" on their actions for future use. In effect, we catch ourselves doing something correctly by feeling the experience of it making us stronger in order to keep doing it the correct way. This occurs in the physical and psychological dimensions.

This singular focus on feeling "right things done right" is especially important in workforce cultures where people are routinely engaged in labor-intensive activities. These workforces will become more valued as they mature.

Skilled workers who handle materials and / or human weight are in constant danger of being removed from the workforce for long periods, or permanently, when they suffer spontaneous or cumulative damage. If the work experience is not making them stronger and more productive, it is likely breaking them down. They are becoming less productive and eventually become unsustainable.

In a number of industries, the loss of human and fiscal capital is considerable, particularly in warehouse and freight distribution, nursing and health care, and public safety and first response.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' press release of November 26, 2013 ("Nonfatal Occupational Injuries and Illnesses Requiring Days Away From Work, 2012"):

"Seven occupations had rates of [days-away-from-work] greater than 375 cases per 10,000 full-time workers: transit and intercity bus drivers; police and sheriff's patrol officers; correctional officers and jailers; firefighters; nursing assistants; laborers and freight, stock and material movers; and emergency medical technicians and paramedics...Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers had the highest number of days-away-from-work cases in 2012 with 63,690 cases (primarily in private industry) and an incidence rate of 391 (up from 367 in 2011)."

That same release included:

“Musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) cases (388,060) accounted for 34 percent of all injury and illness cases in 2012...the median days away from work increased by 1 day to a median of 12 days. Laborer and freight, stock, and material movers had the highest number of MSD cases and an incidence rate of 164 per 10,000 full-time workers—up from 140 in 2011.”

If you are involved in managing the total cost of risk in your organization, or that of your clients, the questions you have to ask yourself are:

- Can we afford to have trained workers out for a dozen days at a time, with the attendant cycle of human loss, lowered performance and reduced productivity?
- Are we addressing the primary source of cumulative injury loss and the sustainability of human capital?
- Does the cost of implementing a solution “stack up” as an investment in the total cost of risk?

Professional Safeguard Resources® has typically found the answers are as follows:

- To the first question, a resounding “no.” We cannot afford to have our trained and often most skilled workers, typically our aging workforces, continually broken down by the cumulative results of work exertion.
- The answer to the second question is also “no.” All too often the symptoms, not the root source, are addressed with after-the-fact solutions: The science of ergonomic redesign, the use of assisting devices, mandated protocols, and return-to-work programs all have value in certain situations. But none directly addresses improvement of the one common element – the individual worker.
- To the third question, we respond with an emphatic “yes.” Statistically, the investment pays for itself 10 – 20 times over in decreased costs. This investment is significantly multiplied when factoring in the total cost of risk, with its increases in productivity and growth, and enhanced operational performance.

Investing strategically in total process improvement can achieve multiple and simultaneous goals: self-insured losses (Workers’ Compensation costs) can be significantly decreased with measurably increased productivity and human capital sustainability. This is noteworthy in an environment with aging workers who are typically more productive as they become more skilled.

An organization’s effort in addressing environmental health, safety, sustainability, productivity and company growth (i.e., with a view to “the total cost of risk”) will witness professional development that brings together workers and management in pursuit of mutually beneficial goals, from the “bottom up” and “top down”. This professional development will be seen as “real” and authentic improvement by all parties and thus will be readily applied to the existing company processes. Such process improvements can be achieved across a culture with a validated program of *imprinted biomechanics®* that

includes the functional actions of workers and management. *“Imprinted biomechanics®”* is both the correct physical work actions by the workers and the correct philosophic attitude of all parties to the process. This is true cultural change in an organization.

This type of “total process improvement” can be implemented through peer-to-peer coaching brought to the “front lines” by employee facilitators with reinforcement from mid-management and executive leadership. All parties can readily see its authenticity and its “real world” applicability to the working environment; this perception on their part becomes the key to its acceptance and thus will typically bring about very successful and consistently strong outcomes. These long term, enhanced cultural changes can readily remain no matter what other changes occur in management or other organizational priorities.

The organization’s effort should be based on a process of continuous improvement “Kaizen” that empowers individuals throughout the company’s ranks to partner with each other in making work behavior changes that remain for the good of the “whole”. The cultural enhancements that result throughout the workforce will prevail no matter what other changes occur in management or organizational priorities.

Best process is best practice. And the best process should be custom designed to fit the organization so that it can bring outcomes that result – for the near, middle and long term – in breakthrough performance.

PSR® Professional Safeguard Resources®, founded in 1984, has been implemented, tested, and validated in the most challenging of labor-intensive industries in the U.S. including Public Safety agencies in 100 cities and federal agencies (first response for human weight handling and *critical body response®*). This system, as process improvement and loss control, has been very successful for EH&S and SH&E with certain national (global) companies in their warehousing, freight beverage & cargo distribution, as well as in diverse utilities (gas & electrical distribution) and oil refineries. Healthcare nursing and skilled care participate with enthusiasm because what all of these industries have in common are limitations to “engineering out” all the risk from the work arena. **In numerous industries and occupations, work exertion is the risk.**

Harnessing the power of the workforce culture to address the total cost of risk to the organization is best achieved by driving a number of related goals simultaneously.

To learn more about addressing the total cost of risk, please see the recent video interview with Dr. Jack S. Kanner, CEO. See front page of web site: www.PSRsafety.com