RETHINKING EMPLOYEE SAFETY TRAINING

HOW INDIVIDUAL PERSONALITY PLAYS A ROLE
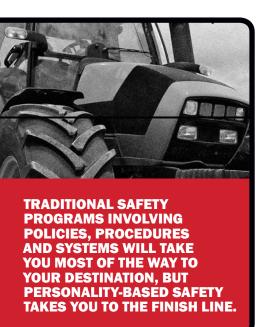
HOGAN

INTRODUCTION

The longstanding belief that proper safety training leads to safer employees is an accurate one. But as a stand-alone, it can only offer limited success, and to further cut down on accidents, organizations must do more. The next step is creating a safety climate that helps employees understand how personality characteristics can result in unsafe behavior or tendencies.

Organizations need to rethink their training initiatives, understand the role that individual personality plays in workplace safety, and provide more effective coaching for employees at all levels to produce a culture of safe work practices.

TRADITIONAL SAFETY PROGRAMS INVOLVING POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND SYSTEMS WILL TAKE YOU MOST OF THE WAY TO YOUR DESTINATION, BUT PERSONALITY-BASED SAFETY TAKES YOU TO THE FINISH LINE.

Many of the world's worst man-made disasters happened not because of an equipment malfunction but because of operator error. The 1979 Three Mile Island nuclear accident is an example. The incident had a chilling effect on how the world looked at nuclear power, with global construction of new reactors declining significantly in subsequent years. Poor training played a role in the accident, as did poor job-fit.

Prior to the accident, operating a nuclear power plant was a desired and prestigious job for locals, attracting some of the brightest and most ambitious area high school students. They went through difficult, challenging and extensive training programs that engaged them with the intellectual demands of problem solving and knowledge absorption. But once on the job, they discovered it to be boring, repetitious and little more than watch-standing, a job unfit for confident, energetic and inquisitive individuals.

Proper safety training was not enough, in this case. Personality assessments would have helped improve the safety climate, and they may have helped determine that the candidates recruited for positions at Three Mile Island, who on the surface seemed like perfect fits, were just the opposite, and the catastrophic results could have been avoided.

Traditional safety programs involving policies, procedures and systems will take you most of the way to your destination, but personality-based safety takes you to the finish line.

RETHINKING TRAINING
WHILE MAINTAINING TRADITION

Time-honored safety programs focus on methods that involve safety equipment training and standard protocol to deal with workplace hazards. They have proved over time to save a significant amount of money.

Businesses spend $170 billion a year on workplace injuries and illnesses. But safety programs have shown to reduce those costs by 20 to 40 percent.[1] That amount can be the difference between a company staying viable and a company closing its doors.

As organizations begin to consider the habits and makeup of individual employees, traditional safety methods should not be pushed to the side; rather, companies should continue to develop them by incorporating a variety of strategies to increase workplace safety, among them:

▲ Enhancing protocol and procedures

▲ Addressing counterproductive work behaviors

▲ Reducing occupational stress and strain

▲ Instituting risk management initiatives

▲ Promoting safety values

Many organizations might be challenged to help employees understand how their own personality characteristics could result in unsafe behavior. Helping management understand the link is the first step.

"They'll ask, 'Why are you giving a personality assessment to a truck driver?' " says Ryan Ross, vice president of consulting for Hogan Assessment Systems. "Then you ask them to describe their best employees and they don't talk about the employees' math skills or their ability to balance a load or put on safety chains. They use terms like 'hardworking,' 'safe,' 'reliable' and 'dependable.' 'Skilled' is about 10 or 12 on the list. That's when they start to understand that those are adjectives about behavior and that each employee's behavior is driven by his or her personality."

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1   Occupational Safety & Health Administration; "Safety and Health Add Value..."; http://www.osha.gov/Publications/safety-health-addvalue.html

Culture and engagement also play significant roles in understanding safety behavior. A company must create awareness and acceptance on an organizational, managerial and employee level. Employees who are not engaged in their jobs are less likely to be engaged in safe work practices, and an environment where there is a lack of emphasis on workplace safety could lead to disastrous consequences.

"A workforce that focuses on safety is a more engaged workforce," says Ross.

The Massey Energy coal mine disaster on April 5, 2010, points to a poor environment for safety and engagement. "We're starting to see that this was a mine operator very focused on production," says Jarrett Shalhoop, a senior consultant at Hogan Assessment Systems. "It's being reported that there was an email sent out that said, in effect, 'If you're being asked by your bosses to do things like building supports or whatever, just ignore them and get back to running coal, because people don't seem to realize that coal pays the bills.' "[2]

UNDERSTANDING HOW PERSONALITY AFFECTS WORKPLACE SAFETY

Because accidents and injuries continue despite safety training, individual personality is being evaluated as a crucial part of workplace safety programs and initiatives. This raises the question of how do differences in employee behavior play a role in overall workplace safety.

Accidents that still occur are associated with decisions that require exercising leadership, under stress, with judgment and control. This is primary as to why the most effective safety training is a combination of traditional programs and the assessment of individual employees' personalities.

Leadership within the organization must help create a culture of not only understanding where and why jobs with risk exist, but also one of worker engagement that helps the employees understand how their personality plays a role in workplace safety.

The Massey coal mine disaster in West Virginia was the nation's worst mine disaster in four decades; 29 miners died during the underground explosion.[3] Despite claims from CEO Donald Blankenship that Massey places an emphasis on safety, statistics suggest a corporate culture where profit trumped all.

In the 15 months prior to the deadly explosion, Massey Energy was fined $1.24 million and received 639 citations for safety violations, many of which were for improper ventilation, the suspected cause of the disaster. But due to the lengthy appeal process, Massey was able to stay open despite the safety hazards.[4]

"There you have a culture that no matter how much training you're doing and whether you're in compliance or not, you've built a culture that very clearly says not to worry about safety," says Jarrett Shalhoop, a senior consultant at Hogan Assessment Systems. "That's a cultural aspect that's going to exist whether or not your employees themselves are rule followers who focus on the work."

▲ **Begin with the right employees** – Make a safety culture testing procedure part of the hiring process. "You want people whose approach is to follow the rules closely," says Shalhoop. "They color between the lines. In my experience, you start with people who have a propensity for safety. You start with the right raw materials."

▲ **Train your managers** – Managers need to have the ability to recognize risk-prone employees and be equipped with the right tools to coach those employees. Many managers have a mental list of employees they view as unsafe, but a highly reliable personality assessment tool can quantify those beliefs and help managers more accurately assess those most likely to cause an accident.

2   Parker, Mario; "Massey CEO Denies Style Led to Blast, Won't Resign (Update2)"; Bloomberg Businessweek; May 5, 2010; http://www.businessweek.com/news/2010-05-05/massey-ceo-denies-style-led-to-blast-won-t-resign-update2-.html
3   Zucchino, David; "Mine operator accused of abusing safety appeals process"; Los Angeles Times; April 27, 2010; http://mobile.latimes.com/inf/infomo?view=page1&feed:a=latimes_1min&feed:c=nationnews&feed:i=53497552
4   Urbina, Ian; "No Survivors Found After West Virginia Mine Disaster"; The New York Times; April 9, 2010; http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/10/us/10westvirginia.html

▲ **Educate your employees** – Help your employees understand how their personality affects workplace safety. Put real-world situations in front of them that relate directly to their safety. It may be a co-worker who is flighty or extra-chatty and it's apparent to the employee that that person is not focused on their work or production and thus poses a safety risk. "They all know that person being described," says Shalhoop. "And that helps them register. That makes the light bulb go on."

Individual behavior has been linked to two high-profile airplane crashes, both in early 2009. In one, everyone aboard died. In the other, all lives were saved.

▲ On Feb. 13, 2009, Continental Airlines Flight 3407 crashed just outside of Buffalo, N.Y., killing all 49 people aboard and one person on the ground. Investigations showed that the pilot was insufficiently trained and that the co-pilot was inexperienced and underpaid, and had complained that night of feeling ill.[5] Furthermore, it was revealed that the two pilots were casually discussing their careers just before the plane began having trouble, a violation of federal law that forbids "irrelevant chatter" below 10,000 feet.[6]

▲ US Airways Flight 1549 crash-landed into New York City's Hudson River on Jan. 15, 2009. All 155 people aboard survived the emergency landing, which was necessitated by engine failure. Captain Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger, a former Air Force pilot and an airline safety expert with 40 years of flight experience; and his co-pilot, Jeff Skiles, who has been flying for over 25 years, successfully glided their stricken plane to a relatively safe landing. The experience and training of the two men, combined with their ability to stay calm in an emergency, are credited with saving the lives of everyone aboard.

While the US Airways crew was hailed as heroes for their quick thinking, the Continental crew was guilty of behavioral actions that have become a common thread in many recent plane crashes. Over the last 10 to 15 years, flight crews that were distracted while talking about personal things have been cited as reasons for many accidents.[7]

"Organizations can have the best processes in the world, but they forget there is a person involved," says Ross. "They forget to focus on the individual."

Hogan collected safety data from 811 employees in a large Midwestern freight company. All employees had been at the company for at least a year and worked a variety of hourly jobs that included components of physical labor, such as heavy lifting and manipulation of heavy machinery. All employees took the HPI.

The study looked at accidents reported over the previous three years.

Analyses revealed the majority of reported accidents proved to be extremely costly, with total damages and loss in production often reaching into the hundreds of thousands of dollars per incident. Among the findings:

▲ The moderate safety group recorded 13.9% fewer major accidents than those in the low safety group.

▲ The high safety group recorded 27.4% fewer major accidents than those in the low safety group.

▲ For those on the job three years or longer, the moderate safety group recorded 46.3% fewer major accidents than those in the low safety group.

▲ For those on the job three years or longer, the high safety group recorded 55.6% fewer major accidents than those in the low safety group.

Using the Safety Report would have shown this organization that hiring only those in the moderate and high safety groups would have resulted in a large drop in costly major accidents. Additionally, as tenure increased, these results were more pronounced.

5   Binko, Richard; "Richard Binko: Flight 3407 crash documents need for better training"; The Buffalo News; May 7, 2010;
    http://www.buffalonews.com/2010/05/07/1043063/flight-3407-crash-documents-need.html
6   Stark, Lisa; "'Jesus Christ!' Transcripts of Buffalo Plane Crash Released"; ABCNews.com; May 12, 2009;
    http://abcnews.go.com/Travel/story?id=7560379&page=1
7   Stark, Lisa; "'Jesus Christ!' Transcripts of Buffalo Plane Crash Released"; ABCNews.com; May 12, 2009;
    http://abcnews.go.com/Travel/story?id=7560379&page=1

THE HOGAN APPROACH

With more than three decades of experience in helping businesses dramatically reduce turnover and increase productivity by hiring the right people, developing key talent and evaluating leadership potential, Hogan created SafeSystem to meet the demands of clients who wanted to add a safety component to their assessment process.

Hogan collected safety data from 185 bus drivers in a large West Coast metropolitan transportation organization. Hogan looked at a variety of criteria, including accidents involving passengers, and documented rule violations, workers' compensation claims and customer complaints. Each employee took the HPI.

The results showed a significant difference between those in the high safety group and those in the low safety group.

▲ High-safety individuals reported 21.8% fewer accidents than those in the low safety group.

▲ High-safety individuals reported 40% fewer rule violations than those in the low safety group.

▲ High-safety individuals reported 25.1% fewer workers' compensation claims than those in the low safety group.

▲ High-safety individuals reported 11.5% fewer customer complaints than those in the low safety group.

These results show the value of the Safety Report for indentifying those employees likely to experience fewer unsafe work behaviors over multiple work-related outcomes.

Hogan has studied unsafe work behavior for over 30 years, and the components of the Hogan SafeSystem are based on the Hogan Personality Inventory, the industry standard for measuring personality in relation to job performance. The SafeSystem assessment takes about 15 minutes to complete. It can be administered online 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and reports can be generated within seconds of completion.

Hogan's Safety Report identifies characteristics that individuals possess that may lead to on-the-job accidents and other unsafe behaviors. The six components of safety-related behavior are:

▲ **Defiant - Compliant:** Low Scorers ignore authority and company rules. High scorers willingly follow rules and guidelines.

▲ **Panicky - Strong:** Low scorers tend to panic under pressure and make mistakes. High scorers are steady under pressure.

▲ **Irritable - Cheerful:** Low scorers lose their tempers and then make mistakes. High scorers control their tempers.

▲ **Distractible - Vigilant:** Low scorers are easily distracted and then make mistakes. High scorers stay focused on the task at hand.

▲ **Reckless - Cautious:** Low scorers tend to take unnecessary risks. High scorers evaluate their options before making risky decisions.

▲ **Arrogant - Trainable:** Low scorers overestimate their competency and are hard to train. High scorers listen to advice and like to learn.

The SafeSystem enables organizations to accurately pinpoint the safety foundation of their workers. Based on hundreds of client research projects conducted over the last 30 years, businesses can predict, and take steps to modify, unsafe behavior.

It is critical that everyone in the company be involved in establishing a safe work environment. Each of these levels must participate:

▲ **Organizational –** It goes beyond simple compliance. The organization must ensure that every employee gets feedback about the company's safety levels and must communicate its expectations regarding safety. The SafeSystem Climate Survey provides critical feedback regarding the existing safety perceptions through the organization.

▲ **Management –** Not only do managers need to be able to recognize the employees with the most risk, they also need to understand how and when to give feedback to help them understand how their personality affects behavior. The SafeSystem Coaching Process provides leadership with the necessary feedback to build and maintain a culture of safe working practices.

▲ **Employees –** Workers who are aware that their personality characteristics may affect their behavior know to take extra care in safety compliance. The Hogan Safety Assessment provides valuable information for developing safe work behaviors.

CONCLUSION

The right combination of traditional safety training and personality assessments that help to gauge safety-related behavior can have a significant impact on your organization's overall safety and bottom line.

"It's important that organizations don't forget about traditional safety programs and safety training," says Ross, "We really believe certain types of safety training are very valuable. It's more of a collaborative effort."

With established employees, an understanding of the role that personality plays in safety is paramount to making the workplace as safe as possible. When bringing in new employees, it is imperative to hire those who will embrace a culture of safety.

"You can train and train and train, but if you start with people who have a propensity for unsafe behavior, you're starting in a hole," says Shalhoop. "You'll never be as good as if you're starting with the right people. And that, in turn, will enhance existing safety programs."

Hogan has studied worker personality for decades and has applied that knowledge to creating a positive safety climate with the Hogan SafeSystem. To find out more about the Hogan SafeSystem, visit www.hogansafesystem.com.

Hogan Assessment Systems is a global personality assessment provider that helps companies select employees, develop leaders, and identify talent. Hogan specializes in identifying high potential candidates for targeted positions, providing leadership development tools to help emerging leaders realize their full potential, and determining relationships between individual personality characteristics and safety performance. Hogan's assessments can be administered in over 40 languages and are available on a state-of-the-art platform, giving customers accurate feedback within seconds of completion.