

Getting to zero accidents

*Build an effective 24/7 safety program by
motivating employees to want to act safely*

By FRED RINE



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Fred Rine is a nationally recognized leader in safety who designs programs that get results. Fred created a safety awareness training program that has been attended by more than 400,000 people in the last 14 years and that has contributed to significant reductions in OSHA recordable accident rates at companies all around the country.



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INTRODUCTION

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

I have been in the occupational safety profession for 40 years and am tired of listening to the myths and beliefs that are driving safety efforts around the country. Companies spend lots of time and resources to make the workplace safe – only to be frustrated with one or more fatalities.

CEOs scratch their heads wondering, “What more should we do?” Their safety personnel too often turn to the things they believe will work because of the “latest” thinking offered in professional magazines. The problem is that the “thinking” comes from those who have never been in the real world.

My company has trained more than 400,000 employees in scores of companies and what I offer comes from the real world of standing all day long in sessions with employees. It matters not whether they are in a union or not, the simple approach of speaking to employees openly and with respect for their world invokes a change in their thinking.

Here is what you will read in this book.

- You won't have a safe workplace without safe behaviors.
- To have safe behavior all the time, you need to address employee attitudes. (It can be done and I'll describe how.)
- Having employees want to be safe requires that safety become a 24/7 family-driven value.
- Addressing the “why” of safety is not behavior-based safety.
- All other efforts for continuous improvement in safety build off the cornerstone of employees “wanting” to be safe.

WHY YOU SHOULD READ THIS BOOK

Below is a sample of employee feedback on the safety awareness sessions conducted by FDRsafety, from both hourly and salaried employees. These sessions motivate safe behavior by helping employees understand why they should be safe – so they can return in one piece to their friends and family.

“The best seminar I have yet to attend”

“Made me think in a new perspective”

“It made me take my life and the well-being of others more seriously”

“I feel I can improve my safety at work and at home”

“This was a life-changing experience”

It is this kind of feedback that keeps my colleagues and me going. We know we are making a difference because employees tell us in class and in their anonymous feedback that they “want” to be safe

Read on and you can learn the secrets of what, how and why.

First let’s address the thinking that constrains improvement.

THE PROBLEM – ‘HAVE TO’

ERRONEOUS BELIEFS DRIVING SAFETY PROGRAMS

If you are frustrated with safety performance, your organization may be operating under one or more of these misguided beliefs:

1. We cannot be responsible for safety off the job; hence we should devote the vast majority of effort to the workplace.
2. Attitudes cannot be changed; therefore encourage safe behaviors.
3. Spending time, money and resources on things like elimination of hazards, engineering controls, management systems, hazards assessments, training, behavior-based safety (BBS), risk assessments, etc. will ultimately provide the desired results – if they don't we will just keep doing more of the same.
4. The rare fatality or really serious incident is the accident that just happens and can't be prevented.
5. People naturally understand “why” they should be safe – our job is to improve their knowledge, skills, abilities and general awareness of hazards.

Einstein is credited with the following quote: “Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

It is a fact that only 4% of fatal accidents occur on the job. 96% of accidental deaths are from vehicular accidents, or accidents at home or in the public domain. Working on 4% of a problem and expecting significant improvement might be considered a form of insanity.

‘TRIED AND TRUE’ APPROACHES AREN’T WORKING WELL ENOUGH

Safety seminars, tailgate/toolbox meetings, surveys, suggestion programs, safety promotions, stand downs, procedural briefings, motivational speeches, quizzes and checklists, emergency preparedness training, safety best practices, evacuation simulations, injury prevention, PPE checks and more are all part of the traditional approaches. These approaches, while providing some results, typically fall short of goals.

While necessary, these tactics alone will not get you to where you want to be. The reason is that most people do not care about safety. It is boring and not perceived as relevant. As much benefit as there is from any of these safety approaches, attitude is typically never addressed.

“Wait a minute,” you may be thinking. “We have been told that you can change behaviors but you cannot force a change in attitude.”

The last part is correct. You cannot *force* a change in attitude, but you can get people to *want* to be safe – and to be accountable for their actions. You can help people conclude that they should change – all by selling the benefits of their own safety.

All of the traditional approaches to safety are based on the assumption that workers want to learn. That is a potentially fatal assumption if we think that skills training will somehow help the employee’s attitude about using their skills.

That is like sending a kid to hockey camp for two weeks to sharpen his skills when he really has no desire to play competitive hockey -- his father wants him to.

If you are a company leader, do you know how to improve attitude on-the-job? Stop talking about what employees *have to* do to improve safety on the job! Yes, you read it right. Stop talking about the “have to’s” because of OSHA or company policy.

Instead, start talking about things like why people take shortcuts. Answers such as “it was quicker” or “it was easier” typically come forth if you are discussing the reasons for unsafe behaviors in an open forum where respect for people is the foundation. Talk about being responsible for one’s actions. Talk to workers about values like family, trust, respect and integrity instead of always giving them a list of rules to follow.

Talk to them about their contributions and what it means for them to come home in one piece.

Does it matter to a worker's family if the worker is killed at work or while driving? The family is still devastated and without their loved one and breadwinner. Discuss concepts of accountability and responsibility. People who take pride in their work are engaged in the work. People who care about their health and well-being are engaged and focused on what they are doing and rarely have accidents happen.

HOW WE LEARNED SAFETY

For the overwhelming majority of people, our parents were the people who taught us our first lessons:

- “Don’t touch a hot stove.”
- “Don’t play in the street.”
- “Don’t touch electrical outlets.”
- “Don’t climb too high into a tree.”
- “Don’t play with matches.”

We all heard the same mantra and we typically responded as children do:

- We touched the hot stove.
- We played in the street.
- We got a jolt from touching the outlet.
- We sometimes climbed higher than we should.
- We lit matches.

The list goes on. Our folks did what they were supposed to do – give us instructions because they loved us and did not want us to be injured. We acted like most young kids. We did the exact opposite of what we were told and tried to avoid being caught. Reflect upon this very important point and you will begin to have a more profound understanding of your own behavior and that of other adults – regardless of their position or job.

Reflecting on our own behaviors helps us understand that we do not like being told that we “have to” do something. Fast forward to work and we find the continuation of “have to.”

We are all familiar with OSHA and its myriad rules.

As good managers and leaders, we take these “shalls” and create the company “shalls” for employees to follow. We know “what” to do, “how” to do it, and, with proper management systems, “who” is responsible for carrying out actions by a certain time, the “when.” However, these rules and systems do not address the hearts and minds of the employees. Employees are still left with the very real and personal question, “Why should I do this?”

TIME AND COMFORT

Ask a group of 20 people why they drive over the speed limit and you will often hear, “It saves me time.” Everyone has too many things going on and time is a precious commodity in today’s hectic world. Ask this same group if they speed on a freeway, and the overwhelming majority will admit that they drive five to nine miles over the speed limit because 10 seems to be the perceived “magic number” under which you will not be nailed for a ticket. Whether that is true or not does not matter because perception becomes the reality of how people behave. It does not matter if the group is comprised of executives, salaried personnel, hourly workers or even safety professionals, the responses are typically the same. Time is precious, and few of us are willing to do the right thing all the time. It seems not to matter that we know better – that we know what to do -- our quest for time wins out.

It takes time to:

- Pull off the road and use your cell phone.
- Make sure that everyone in the front and back of your vehicle is properly buckled up.
- Count the number of doors to a hotel exit, read the instructions and develop a safety plan in the event of fire.
- Wear your safety glasses and hearing protection when mowing the lawn.
- Go get the right tool or equipment to do a job – (eg. taking time to get a taller ladder could greatly enhance safety for certain tasks).

Think about some of the things that we do in our everyday lives:

- Not buckling up before driving to work.
- Driving 30 mph in a 25 mph zone because it is really early and no one is around.
- Entering a freeway with a 70 mph speed limit and driving 77 mph in the fast lane (the speed of others in that lane) even though the pavement is wet.
- Needing something that you can’t reach in an overhead cabinet and using a nearby chair rather than taking time to get help or a step stool.
- Not using the stairway handrail because you are carrying a stack of papers, and using one hand would require a smaller load and two trips.

The list could go on, but each of these little decisions is a risk assessment. Typically, we make the decision so quickly that we do not even consider the consequences should something happen. If that “something” did occur, we would call it an “accident.” Yet, as professionals, we know that the combination of conditions and behaviors coupled with probability leads to injuries on and off the job.

Let us now look at the second part of why we may not do the things that we know improve safety.

Comfort is that other biggie, especially if safety protective equipment is involved. Seat belt restraints, safety glasses, hearing protection, fall protection equipment in industrial settings all have one thing in common. To varying degrees, they really are not very comfortable.

Safety professionals, operations managers and employees will agree that PPE is not comfortable, even though many organizations do their level best to find the best, most comfortable PPE available.

In view of time and comfort issues, the traditional tools of “have to” and safety training do not appear to be working as well as they should. Safety training to improve knowledge or skill does not address the employee’s unspoken “What’s in it for me?” Training is necessary but not sufficient for the challenge. In order to get to zero accidents, it is time to face the challenge head on.

THE SOLUTION – ‘WANT TO’

SELL THE BENEFIT

We keep trying to promote safety with employees like trying to sell a car by extolling only the features of the vehicle. To be a successful salesman, you must be aware that products and services have both features and benefits. You must know the distinction between the two and which one your customer buys. Features are what something is or has. When you buy a car, it has a steering wheel. That is one of the features of a car; another is tires.

But did you buy your car because it had a steering wheel and tires? You would not have purchased your car if it did not have those things but that is not why you bought your car. You bought your car because you wanted to be able to drive from point A to point B with a certain amount of safety, comfort and style – and autonomy of when you want to travel. Those are the benefits of owning a car. People buy benefits.

If we want to sell safety, we should quit preaching safety and telling people why they “have to” be safe. They could give two hoots about what OSHA requires. They come to work to get a paycheck – typically to support their family and loved ones. I will show that focusing on family and values is the benefit that gets people to want to be safe.

ADDRESSING 'WHY'

If your organizational culture is one that demands conformance to good safety practice, you are fortunate indeed. In such cultures, employees and peers will step up when they see something wrong. The value "I care about you" is evident when someone points out that taking a shortcut is "not the way things are done around here."

However, not all companies are blessed with having that existing culture. For them, addressing the why of safety is a soft issue that can be a formidable challenge. Before we explore the "why" of things, it is important to lay some ground rules for "how" you address the "why." Some things to consider are:

- "Why" must be based upon respect for all employees as individuals and recognition that we are all human.
- If you do not approach adults on an adult level, dealing with real world issues that they can relate to, you will not get to first base on the issue of "why."
- Addressing "why" requires talking with employees in an open, honest manner.
- Management as well as hourly workers must be fully engaged in the process.
- "Why" can only be done as a complement to an existing excellent safety process.
- Safety must be 24/7.
- Getting people to think about "why" they do things and become more accountable for their actions because they "want to" is not a silver bullet.

Without people understanding "why," there is little chance of reaching the level where they "want to" be safe.

MOVING TO ‘WANT TO’

If we accept that time and comfort are powerful motivators in our everyday lives, what would motivate people to want to take longer to do something in a less comfortable manner, even if it were safer? Let us assume that we are having an adult discussion about safety and safety awareness with a group of employees and supervisors.

Ask the group what they most value and most would say, “My family.” Most humans would typically do anything to protect their children and loved ones. Think about how this translates to your own personal behavior. For those who admit to driving over the speed limit, most will willingly slow down to 25 mph in a school zone, especially when children and school buses are present. Why is this so? Perhaps because we innately understand the increased risk and would do nothing that might harm a child. We know and instinctively recognize the value of family and children.

While this scenario might seem far-fetched, tell the group that you intend to visit someone’s home that evening and harm one of their children. Select any person and ask them to give you their address. The dumbfounded expression will demonstrate that there is zero chance that you will have the opportunity to visit the home. Suddenly the concept of “zero” takes on new meaning. When people think about harm coming to their family, they will do anything to provide necessary protection. What would happen to your family if you were seriously hurt or killed?

It matters not whether it happens at work, at home or while in the car. Most families would be devastated.

Is it possible to help everyone become more safety conscious by appealing to the values that drive most of us? Is this a step in right direction to get people to “want to” be safe? Yes. But we need to go further and explore what might be significant root cause issues in safety:

- How many incident reports address the root causes of time or comfort as significant issues?
- When have you last complemented existing safety initiatives with open discussion that might help employees offset their quest for time and comfort with more awareness about families and what risk-taking actions might do?
- When was the last time supervisors or safety trainers addressed these issues without a “have-to” type of safety instruction?

And even if we did a great job in the occupational setting, we could miss the bigger picture.

SAFETY 24/7

The Statistics for Unintentional Deaths issued by the National Safety Council each year show that only 4% of accidental deaths are on-the-job.

Companies with excellent safety processes often have programs that attempt to address risk off the job in addition to safety at work. However, those same organizations often remain focused on OSHA recordable rates and incidents while on the job.

If we wish to get to zero, we need to increase awareness that safe behaviors on and off the job require 24/7 thinking. If you want to have employees think more about safety, they must become more conscious of the impact on their family if they are hurt or killed. We are all human, and as humans, we sometimes do things that are contrary to what we should do. If you have a room of executives, hourly employees or safety pros, and ask if anyone ever acted unsafely, every person would have to raise their hand if they were being honest.

Think about the times that you personally have driven over the speed limit, used a cell phone while driving or did not work safely on a ladder.

Even safety professionals who extol others to work safely often violate some law or common sense rule that would improve their safety. We are all human.

Every organization wants employees to be safe on the job, off the job and while driving. If injured, the employee experiences pain and suffering and the company loses the services of the employee. In many companies, the cost for healthcare for off-the-job injuries is often far greater than the costs for worker's compensation. Potential for pain and suffering may not be foremost in the person's mind, and the cost to the company is certainly not part of their thinking.

Perhaps impact on their family and loved ones could be. If we are to appeal to the hearts and minds of everyone in the organization, we cannot suggest that their safety is more important at work than it is off the job or when driving. You can bet the devastation to their family is the same, regardless of where a serious or fatal injury might occur.

IMPROVING SAFETY AWARENESS

We do not need a lot of words or complex measures to help increase safety awareness. We need something simple to help employees have a visual model of how to think about the “why” of safety. The natural human tendency to save time and seek comfort that leads to unsafe actions must be offset by something that is more compelling. That something is the major impact that my personal safety has on the lives of my family.

Employees taking personal responsibility and accountability for their actions are the beginning of an approach where safety is a value within the organizational culture. Those baby steps lead to the desired environment where people begin to address shortcuts and unsafe actions by their peers. Safety becomes part of “the way things are done around here.”

The model below, based on 10 words, helps employees visualize how they can replace the traditional approach to safety with one that appeals to personal values.

The 10 words

Safety

Have to

Want to

Time

Comfort

Value

Family

Accountability

These 10 words address why people take risks (time and comfort) and provide the offset (safety is a family value) that helps people move from “have to” to “want to.” The foundation for this model to be successful is accountability. In this case, it is the personal accountability of every person in the organization. Remember that our goal is zero injuries.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability links responsibility to consequences. When President Harry Truman said, "The buck stops here," he meant that he was responsible for his decisions and he accepted the consequences that followed them. Performance should be measured against specific process safety goals and/or objectives. Accountability is a fundamental management principle, long established. People must not only understand what they are responsible for but also understand that they will be accountable for the results.

Traditionally, enforcement through a disciplinary procedure is thought to be one important piece of a balanced "culture of consequences." The other component is the regular use of positive recognition when employees meet or exceed expectations.

There is no chance of getting to zero without carefully designing rules for safe and healthful practices that cover all personnel, from the site manager to the hourly employees. Since hourly employees are most involved with activities exposing them to hazards, it makes good sense to include them in the establishment of safe work practices and safe work rules. However, as we have already seen, most fatal and serious injuries occur off the job and while driving. That fact alone drives us to consider safety a value and promote the concept of Safety 24/7. When individuals look openly at their own actions, it becomes clear that humans like to take shortcuts.

While positive reinforcement and recognition coupled with enforcement are necessary, it is naïve to believe that employees will magically believe the "why" for following safe practices all the time – something that is required if zero is to become a reality.

Getting to zero will require new thinking in existing excellent safety cultures. We must strive for three levels of accountability:

1. Self discipline
2. Peer discipline
3. Management discipline

The organizational culture (not a safety culture that functions in a silo -- this issue is discussed later) must be one of demonstrating "I care" and respect for people, while recognizing the real-world challenges of their work. We would hope that safety is so much a part of the fabric of the organization that the vast majority of potential issues are addressed by a combination of self and peer discipline. That is when the organization's culture and system of work reinforces correct behaviors – on and off the job.

A company with excellent safety results will usually have a well-established accountability program in effect. Never more fitting than for safety accountability is the expression “It comes from the top.” However, not all incidents can be controlled by the implementation of a carefully planned accountability program. Injuries and illness will occur as long as risk is present, and some degree of risk remains in every action we take.

Ask yourself, “What is my organization doing so that employees want to be safe?” Without that foundation, accountability becomes a “catch me if you can” challenge.

This is when you find:

- Workers know how to work safely, and at times choose not to.
- Workers may see others work in an unsafe manner and choose to say nothing.
- Managers fail to explore the reasons workers don't work safely; hence they do not really understand the problem and underlying causes.

If we force compliance with safety rules and encourage safe behaviors, we may still miss the fundamental of “why.” These traditional efforts may result in resistance by employees for reasons we discuss later. We need people “wanting” to be accountable to themselves and their fellow workers.

Many organizations have the traditional elements for accountability but are frustrated with having injuries and illnesses no longer declining as desired by the organization. If we look at the traditional elements of excellent safety processes, we find that they address the issues of “what,” “how,” “when,” and by “whom.”

A culture where people want to be accountable will only result when everyone understands fully and completely the “why” at a personal level.

However, “why” people should be practicing safety at work, home and on the road is often overlooked in the tactics and strategies for driving to zero. Because we do not know “how” to address the “why” we sometimes see increased amounts of skills training in hopes that it will also foster increased awareness.

For many, the path to improved culture seems to make sense. The problem is that prevailing wisdom often suggests that an improved “safety culture” is the goal.

DO WE REALLY WANT SAFETY CULTURE?

This is a hot topic. A quick internet search shows numerous hits with articles, presentations, blogs and podcasts all dealing with the issue of “safety culture.” At the risk of being labeled a heretic, I wish to challenge this popular belief. First, safety is a staff job. We perform technical and administrative duties assisting the Chief Executive Officer or Chief Operating Officer, whom we properly challenge as being responsible for the health and well-being of employees. The same top executive whom we serve is also responsible for quality, profitability, and all the other complex issues that must integrate into the overall fabric of any successful organization for sustainable growth. It is inappropriate to strive for a “safety culture.”

If we create a “safety culture” does it not follow that it will compete with the “quality culture”, a “green culture” or the “service culture?” Does it not make more sense if safety is a value within the overall organizational culture?

Let us for the moment accept that safety is a value within the overall organization. Not only does this view facilitate better integration of safety into overall organizational activities but opens the door for safety to be a value 24/7. When we do so, we find great opportunity to reach those who have not “wanted” to be safe.

I had a very rewarding experience at a safety awareness program I conducted for a group of drivers in Detroit.

I started by asking all in attendance to introduce themselves, as I always do. Red flags started waving in my mind when one veteran began talking. He said he had 35 years in as a driver and would be retiring in five days.

“I don’t want to be here,” he said. “After 35 years on the road, I don’t need safety training.”

I began worrying that he would cast a pall over the session with non-stop nay saying. So imagine my surprise when he approached me at the end of the session, complimented me on the training, and told me he planned a major change in his behavior. He said he had never worn a seat belt in his 35 years on the road. However, he said he now realized why it was important. He planned to wear one in his remaining few days so that he would actually make it to retirement.

Talking to people on an adult level and driving home personal accountability for “safety is a value” might reach those who “don’t need safety training.”

“Why I want to be safe” is enabled by changing our views so that the foundation for making safety a value is the family. To understand this, we need to review our personal behaviors. Using respect for individuals and common sense to have employees want to be safe can reap many benefits for the employee and the organization.

PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

”Attitude” is what people think and feel. It is a person’s beliefs and values that influence how they react to the world about them. Examples of attitude are:

- “Safety rules are a pain – hope the boss doesn’t catch me.
- “Here comes another program of the month – I’ll just wait this one out.”

”Behavior” is what people do. Behavior is influenced by attitude and by the culture of the organization. Examples of behavior are:

- Somebody following safety rules even though they don’t believe in them.
- Someone not following safety rules.

”Culture” is best described as the accepted ways of working within an organization, the values, beliefs and standards of conduct that people accept as normal. Examples of culture are:

- People following safety rules and looking out for others because they want to.
- The blame culture: Everybody points the finger of blame and mistakes are punished.

Trying to change behavior without tackling underlying attitudes and surrounding daily behaviors with a robust organizational culture is a never-ending battle.

The ABCs of safety are best visualized as follows:

You begin with “A” or attitude for the reasons I have already outlined.

Ideally, positive attitudes manifest well-adjusted behaviors. It really is possible to foster attitudes that promote safe behavior. Examples are

- “I’ll wear my seat belt because I want to stay safe for my family”
- “I will lock out even if it takes extra time – my health and well-being depend upon it.”

After you help move people from “having to” be safe to “wanting to” be safe, the challenge is maintaining and building upon your original success.

After dealing with attitudes, jump to “C” for culture, using leadership and a system that allows top management to drive continuous improvement.

When safety is a value and continuous improvement is based upon respect for people and fully engaging the workforce, the necessary ingredients are in place for positive change in safety behaviors – on and off the job.

Start with "A," then move to "C" and the desired behaviors, "B" (benefits) will follow.

The new model of safety ABCs should be ACBs.

OVERALL BENEFITS

Imagine a culture where employees “want to” be safe, on and off the job. Your organization might find:

- Healthy employees with families that also have fewer injuries and illnesses because of the increased safety awareness.
- Reduced costs, both direct and indirect.
- The opportunity to bust organizational silos because Medical, Wellness, Safety, Ergonomics, Worker’s compensation, Healthcare, Restricted Work and other related activities all become focused on the same value (Safety 24/7) which must ultimately drive new metrics on the quest for zero. Creation of new metrics (process or data) that attempt to measure performance for reducing risk off the job and while driving will only occur when Safety makes the case that OSHA recordkeeping is not sufficient.
- Improved morale in a culture built around “I care.”
- Closer alignment with all continuous improvement and quality activities where “zero” is also the goal.

SUMMARY

I have attempted to make a case that significant numbers of personnel (hourly and salary) engage in risky behavior on a daily basis for the simple reasons of time and comfort. Changing the mindset of everyone to “want to be safe” will require new thinking. Organizations will require:

- Leadership
- Management systems.
- Safety as a value within the overall organizational culture

To get to zero injuries, we must expand our thinking and add to efforts focused on the traditional elements for excellent organizational systems. We are all challenged to address the “why” of safety, including off the job and vehicle safety with a focus on 24/7 safety awareness. Telling people, “You have to do this” will not help people offset their natural tendency to ignore “have to” rules. Nor does it address the time and comfort issues.

If we do not create an offsetting process for people to “want to” be safe, it is probable that personnel will continue in their past habits. Inserting safety awareness built upon “safety is a family driven value” is an approach intended to complement an existing sound safety process. Without taking a new look at “why” we all do the things we do, it is fair to assume that the goal of zero injuries will remain more a vision than a goal. If you are not sure about next steps for “getting to zero,” you might wish to consider the value of family driven safety.

Quit working on only 4% of the problem. Start working on Safety 24/7.

SPREAD THE WORD

This book is available for free download on the FDRsafety website www.fdrsafety.com.

For more information about the safety awareness training program Fred Rine has designed please go to www.fdrsafety.com. The training has been presented to more than 400,000 employees and managers across the country and is credited with reducing OSHA recordable accident rates for many companies.

Fred is available to address companies and trade associations with a motivational presentation on safety awareness.

FDRsafety also provides OSHA compliance services, temporary safety staffing, expert witnesses and industrial hygiene services.

For information on any of these services contact FDRsafety: 1-888-755-8010 or info@fdrsafety.com.