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Inside This Issue

The Importance of Reporting 'Near Misses'

by John Cameron

What if you could anticipate dangerous situations before they happened? You could fix the problem preventatively, totally mitigating the risk to your workers? The solution to this issue is to take some time in developing a protocol for reporting 'Near Misses'….a proactive vs. a reactive approach.

A near miss, often referred to as a close call, occurs when an incident happens that does not result in an interruption in production, personal injury, equipment or environmental damage. In other words, it's a key warning sign, that is often ignored, that requires certain precautions to be put in place so the situation doesn't become an accident. The near miss is, in reality, an accident waiting to happen.

During my time working in workplace safety, I have rarely encountered an incident that was a "one-off" occurrence. In almost every case, during the incident investigation I will hear about near misses that had happened, sometimes for years, that never were reported or corrected. This is clearly a problem that is not unique to one organization, but is widespread across many companies.

One issue in particular from the past stands out as the perfect example of why the reporting of near misses is so important. I was investigating an accident where an employee had lost a few fingers working with a machine. It didn't take very long before I had a line of other workers telling me about the hundreds of close calls they'd had working with the same equipment. The unfortunate thing is that if the fellow workers been more vocal when this had happened to them, this worker's life-altering injury would have been prevented.

What is needed in most organizations is to develop a positive safety culture, where employees understand that it is in their own best interests to report these potentially dangerous situations. We should never be investigating an incident and hear the refrain of 'nothing happened so I didn't think it was a big deal.' We need our workers to understand that every close call is a big deal.

Developing a protocol that employees see as valuable, in order to track these near misses, can be one of the most proactive tools that we have at our disposal in accident prevention.

The SSI Team

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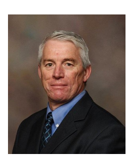

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Change Needs a Reason

A friend of mine recently joined a company in an executive capacity and helped set them on a new course that is delivering renewed growth.

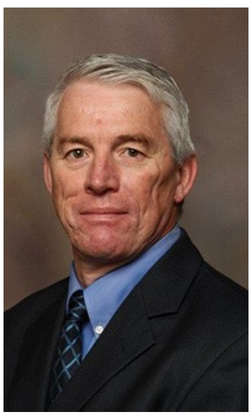
Talking with him about the improvements, he was reluctant to take credit, pointing out that he has an excellent, experienced team supporting him and implementing the changes.

While the "experienced team" aspect is true, when people (i.e. prospects and clients) look at a company that is communicating "things are different now", they need to understand 'why' they are different. They need a reason.

In my friend's case, the changes he executed, and their positive effect, caught the favourable attention of the media. In the article I read, it was apparent that the 'why' for the positive change was because of the experience and leadership my friend brought to the business. These changes, and interest from the media, re-opened interest from some of their former clients.

People want to understand the "why" so they can have faith that their renewed interest in the company isn't misplaced. The reason must be significant, it must produce positive results, and it must be communicated.

When people see the positive results, and understand the 'why', then they'll believe things are different from the past, and that may re-open the doors of opportunity.



Mike Farrell
Process Improvement Specialist

Guide Improvement Planning with Value Stream Mapping

When you have many things to improve in your products and services, it can be difficult to understand where to begin.

Process Improvement is an ongoing effort to address issues, and helps you make sure that you're working on the issues that will have the biggest impact to your customers. Furthermore, you can use Value Stream Mapping as a key process improvement tool to help identify issues that impact your ability to get things done, and to develop effective improvement plans for your organization. It can also maximize the probability that the plans will actually get implemented and become meaningful and sustained improvements over the long-term.

Value Stream Mapping starts by creating families of similar products/services, then determining the steps and pace that the organization adheres to in order to meet customer demand. This helps get everything organized, allows you to map your current state process, and identifies the specific location of the problem. After you have identified the issue(s), tools from the Lean toolbox can help improve your workflow and ensure that your products and services get to your customers in a more efficient manner.

Larry Rosborough
Consulting Partner

Getting to Root Cause - Troubleshooting Quality

The last thing any business wants is for customers to receive bad products or services. That's why it's vital that we understand where problems can occur and how best to work through them. This is the primary reason why taking a Root Cause Analysis approach to problem solving is key to ensuring that problems are indeed solved, and do not reoccur in the future.

Sometimes taking a step back from the problem, rather than rushing to find a quick fix, allows you to find a resolution to the problem in a way that will ensure it doesn't resurface in the future. In my experience, the best method for finding these root causes is 'The 5 Whys of Root Cause Analysis', which is part of the Lean thinking approach that many successful organizations promote today.

This approach has resulted in many organizations achieving results that were once thought to be impossible.

Digging deeper into underlying issues often results in taking steps to prevent the problem from getting worse. Once you've gone beyond the obvious, you'll be able to determine the real issue and develop a lasting solution that will better serve the needs of your business and your customers.

Three Bids and a Buy

Keith Carruthers
Supply Chain and Operations Specialist

Anyone who has been involved in selling goods and services in the business to business environment has undoubtedly come across the scenario where their offering looks good to the customer, yet they are unable to close the deal as the other party in the transaction needs "three bids".

Although this is often unavoidable where public sector procurement is concerned, I am still astonished when private sector companies put similar policies in place for their Purchasing teams. Not only does this policy slow things down and prevent the organization from the timely execution to deliver on it's value promise to the customer, if often promotes a "lowest price" mentality that usually provides a less than optimal solution.

There is no doubt that some spend categories can benefit from a tendering approach, or even expanding on this concept to the world of "reverse auctions", where potential vendors battle it out in the marketplace in a race to the bottom… the world of lowest price wins!

Although few can argue that this approach will inevitably provide the lowest price to the purchasing party, it does not allow for other important considerations, such as quality, lead time, and the entire relationship approach to maximizing value from potential vendors.

As a Supply Chain Professional, I operate under the mindset to avoid the tendering process entirely, placing all of the flexibility for vendor selection with my team, allowing us to determine the optimal vendor(s) to maximize value for the organization and it's customers.

The flexibility provided by avoiding the Laws of Competitive Bidding, ensures that we are able to look at long-term value, and total cost of ownership considerations more freely that if we were restricted to tenders. Remember, unit price is but one factor in value creation, and in many cases, it is far from the most important.

We need to recognize that the Supply Chain Management profession, of which procurement plays a key role, has changed dramatically over the past few decades. People are not as price sensitive as they once were. They have increasing demands from the vendor they buy from, are extremely impatient and want results now, We cannot afford to continue to operate with a three bids and a buy mentality if we expect to maintain or grow our customer base.

Management Reference Checklists

Bernie Casey
Business Strategist

In an attempt to become a more effective leader, I have spent a significant amount of time researching strategies that I can use to help me deal with specific challenges. In this vein, I have developed a number of different checklists to help me succeed at overcoming these challenges.

Using a checklist is a simple but meaningful approach to improving execution and to establishing a robust process to ensure that challenges are resolved. It allows a person the opportunity to regain their bearings, and develop an effective and standardized approach to dealing with specific issues, and to ensure the issues to not reoccur in the future.

When considering a potential goal, I apply the SMART mentality:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Truthful/Timely

We all have new challenges and issues to deal with on a day to day basis. These challenges are often avoided, or are over-analyzed and made into complex issues limiting our chances of implementing timely solutions. Sometimes we overcomplicate things, and forget that oftentimes, simpler is better.

When new challenges surface, I follow the adage 'every problem has a solution' and work through the following simple, yet effective, steps:

1.Write it down

2.Define the problem in detail. It is difficult to fix what you don't understand

3.List the potential alternatives, and the advantages and disadvantages of each

4.Make a decision. Most times, the worst decision is no decision

5.Follow up on your commitments, and ensure you follow through on the plan

Although simple in nature, and common sense to most, I have found that making use of these simple checklists often results in being a more effective leader with a happier and more productive team.

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Human Resources: Frontline Leadership

by Keith Carruthers

I often tell people that being a Supervisor was the toughest job I have ever had, while at the same time, being by far the most rewarding.

Although as Supervisors we often feel caught-up between the wants and needs of the Management Team and the wants and needs of the employees, it is truly a role where you have the opportunity to make a significant impact in both the growth of the company, as well as the growth of your fellow employees and team members.

Many Frontline Leaders, however, are unsuccessful due to their inability to prioritize their time, and not focusing on the "big rocks" that are so critical to success in their role. They forget, or are oblivious to the fact, that their role exists in the organizational chart primarily to lead and manage the performance of team members. They get so overwhelmed with daily tasks that they minimize their important leadership activities and, in many cases, spend no time leading their people at all.

Many of you may have heard or seen people demonstrate the theory of focusing on the "big rocks", or the key important activities. It is simply a matter of properly prioritizing your work. As a Frontline Leader, it is critical to always remember why your job exists, and to ensure that you are dedicating time to your people, and to leading your team. Focus on the big rocks, and don't deprive yourself of the rewards associated with becoming a high performance leader.

About Us

SSI Consulting Solutions is a Canadian company that specializes in helping its clients gain competitive advantage through implementation of world class business practices. It is through these practices that our clients not only compete, but gain significant advantage over their competitors, thereby allowing them to gain market share and enhance shareholder profitability.

The global nature of today's business environment has resulted in increased competition, razor thin margins, and an enhanced focus on servicing the customer. Price and Quality no longer win orders, but are "a given" in the marketplace…..it is those who can deliver consistently and with the shortest lead times that win and retain new customers. Our consulting philosophy is formed around the concepts of teamwork, partnership, service, and quality, both in the coordination of our efforts within our firm and in our interactions with our clients. The core project team will be led by a member of our senior consulting team. The strength and qualifications of our firm enables us to provide analysis that is both prompt and thorough.

Keith Carruthers President and CEO, SSI Consulting Solutions

We strive to form partnerships with our clients. Our best recommendations can be delivered only through recognition of each client's unique situation. Effective communication of our work is a top priority as we believe that timeliness and stakeholder alignment are essential to project success. We deliver a quality, timely service as promised., and take pride in delivering high value to our clients.

Our areas of expertise: Lean, Occupational Health and Safety, Finance, Six Sigma, Marketing , Frontline Leadership Coaching, Human Resources Management, Business Strategy, Change Management, Management Coaching, Supply Chain and Operations Management