

Safety Leadership at Work

Good work through effective leadership – the Safety Leadership at Work Program

Queensland Government

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Simon Blackwood

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland is pleased to be part of the second Safe Work Australia Virtual Seminar Series. Last year, we shared our focus of working directly with industry to progress the work health and safety agenda in Queensland.

We introduced some of our industry safety leaders and shared their views on how important effective leadership is to deliver safe and productive business outcomes. But our safety leadership journey really began some years before that. In 2009 we introduced the Zero Harm at Work Leadership Program which focused on encouraging senior management to demonstrate their commitment to safety. More than 300 business leaders signed up to the program and signalled their support for creating safer and healthier workplaces.

Six years on and following extensive consultation with industry, we've explored opportunities to build on the success of the program and further develop a strong safety culture in Queensland workplaces. We are going beyond our traditional networks and involving safety leaders from all levels of industry, not just senior management. We have changed the program name to reflect these changes and called it *the Safety Leadership at Work Program*. Our overarching goals for the program are to build safety leadership capacity, improve safety culture and as a result reduce injuries and fatalities in Queensland workplaces.

Our expanded focus is not about developing safety leadership capacity but about sharing and promoting the latest research and industry practices about workplace systems, processes and activities to sustain effective safety leadership practices and improve safety culture.

We've established an expert reference group to guide the direction of the program. Members have been drawn from academia, industry and employee stakeholder groups with each member bringing a unique contribution to the program.

For many workplace leaders the safety vision they are still working towards is focused on achieving an absence of injury, but there is so much more to be gained through creating a strong safety culture including enhanced worker health and wellbeing and increased business success and productivity. To truly support a positive safety culture, leaders need to develop open communication, build trust and actively engage their workforce and supply chain partners.

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland is actively involved in the response to the National Work Health and Safety Strategy through good work design, leadership and culture. Good work design is the elimination or minimisation of hazards and risks and optimisation of human performance, job satisfaction and productivity by considering all aspects of the work, the physical environment and people who do the work. Designing good work is closely linked with the actions required to demonstrate safety leadership - learning from experts, evidence and experience, actively involving those who do the work including supply chains and networks, engaging decision makers and leaders.

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The same principles and practices underpin our approach to the Safety Leadership at Work Program. The program activities directly promote learning from research and industry leaders, actively involving those who do the work and focuses on building the safety leadership capacity of decision makers and leaders. Join me now as we hear more about the approaches the program is taking to building safety leadership and

culture practices, contributing to good work design outcomes and ultimately reducing injuries and fatalities in Queensland workplaces.

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Jennie Hunter

I'm Jennie Hunter, Manager of the Leadership and Culture Strategy Unit at Workplace Health and Safety Queensland.

Over 900 people from a range of industry sectors are members of our Safety Leadership at Work Program. I want to ask you to take a few moments to imagine the unique experiences of each and every one of those members. What sectors do they work in – construction, health care, transport or manufacturing? What is their role in the workplace – supervisor, general manager, small business owner or a certified professional? What safety experiences have they had in their current workplace or over the course of their career? What does safety leadership mean to them? What are the unique safety challenges they are dealing with? When you think about the range of possibilities presented you get a sense of the size of the safety challenges workplace leaders are dealing with.

The Safety Leadership at Work Program aims to help members address their safety challenges through tools and resources, events and learning from other safety leaders. One of the priorities of the program is to find ways to bring about a shared understanding of what safety leadership really means and to provide an evidence-based approach to support the take-up of safety leadership and culture practices across industry.

To meet these goals we have developed a Safety Leadership and Culture Model that introduces the key influences and practices of safety culture. The model has four components which contribute to an organisation's safety culture. One – demonstrating safety leadership from the top down, two – building a safety culture through six key engagement principles, three – the importance of safety leadership at all levels, and four – understanding the drivers of safety climate.

Let's start with the importance of senior management valuing safety and setting a positive example. Through research and industry consultation we have found that there are a range of ways to demonstrate safety leadership including management commitment, having the right resources and capability to lead safety, valuing the input of workers and the importance of leadership style, matching the situation and intended outcomes.

Depending on an organisation's safety culture maturity, leadership capability and safety challenges a number of different leadership practises may be affected. For example senior managers may be more actively engaged in setting the safety agenda, providing the resources required to address safety problems and communicating the priority of safety across the workforce and through the supply chain. Supervisors are more likely to be involved with day-to-day safety leadership through the provision of feedback to staff, problem solving and ensuring quality communication keeps workers informed of important safety matters.

Although good safety leadership starts with senior management building a positive safety culture needs the involvement of workers, supervisors and supply chain partners. Workplace leaders need to recognise the factors influencing safety behaviour including values, beliefs and motivators. Good work design requires workers to be equipped with the safety knowledge the need to do their job. The levels of safety knowledge across the workforce will influence workers' abilities to comply with or participate in health and safety activities in the workplace.

Safety leadership is important at every level of the business and across the supply chain if you want to create and sustain a positive safety culture. The Safety Leadership at Work Program promotes stories from a broad range of safety leaders across a range of industries. The films and case studies showcase different leadership practices and behaviours that are effective across a range of leadership roles from supervisors

through to senior managers, CEOs and board members. The model recognises how the key drivers of safety climate can shape a safety culture over time.

Safety climate is a measure of the perceptions and beliefs an individual has about the organisation's safety efforts. Key drivers of safety climate include the priority placed on safety within the overall business context, visibility of safety leadership, alignment of workplace practices to top management policy and a shared perception that safe work is valued by the business. The model is a key foundation of the Safety Leadership at Work Program and provides a roadmap for the development and delivery of program resources and activities, and it informs our approach to industry engagement.

One of the first projects we have delivered to bring the model to life is a series of leadership films. The films feature senior business leaders speaking about their experience and insights of leading safety. I would like to share with you today three films and three different perspectives on how workplace leaders can design good work and influence their safety culture, not only in their own business but across their supply chain and the broader community.

In the first film David Foote, CEO of Australian Country Choice talks about leading the journey towards the goal of best practice with an honest account of some of the setbacks and challenges he has faced along the way. David understands the value of effective consultation and communication with workers and taking them with you on the safety leadership journey.

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David Foote

My name's David Foote. I'm the CEO of a family owned company Australian Country Choice based in Brisbane but operating across most of south western Queensland and here in Brisbane we have a meat processing facility that does primary processing, value adding, retail packing and we employ 1,220 Queenslanders.

I came to this industry after a lifetime in agriculture being a farmer but having had a short break as an underground miner in the nickel operations of the deserts of Western Australia which was both life changing in both monetary rewards and life changing in my attitude toward two important parts of life now – safety and work practices.

Whilst I only spent 11 and a half months as an underground miner I actually lost five co-workers. We were actually attending a funeral there for every two months and chipping in out of our weekly wage to widows who were probably my age as well – 23 or 24 and probably a kid in a pram or a kid on the way. So it's taken probably 30 years though for that to sink in and work out that it doesn't have to be the norm.

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ACC took over the Cannon Hill site back in 2000 and it would be fair to say that probably the safety culture in the site and the workforce at that time may have been at a near all-time low. We entered here what I think was one of the worst insurance premium rates for work cover and over the time we worked out that every impact we could have on reducing that actually was a financial benefit. So within three years of taking over the site we actually managed to reduce our initial premiums by 50%. That financial benefit not only gave us more productivity and less lost time, it also created some dollars to start to develop some safety processes and importantly install some safety equipment across the site and maybe bring the site up which has been here in existence for 90 years, to a more modern level of a workplace.

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Whilst ACC strives and we talk about best practice, we talk about leadership, we want to be at the front, we want to be a good role model, we're not perfect. We are not incident free. We've had two major incidents

in the last 10 years that involved either a forklift incident here at the factory and a serious injury to a young lady and we've had a more recent amputation at one of our feed mill operations out in rural. The amputation incident out of the feedlot which is in quite a small workforce community where they all live together and work together was dramatic. The district was flooded. We actually couldn't get any ambulances in or out. We couldn't get traffic in or out. The only helicopter in the district was six hours away. So we actually had to provide medical assistance on site for a major amputation and the emotional impact that had on staff is still telling today. In fact, some of our staff have still been receiving counselling over that incident more than a year later.

The incidents give you a constant reminder of are you doing everything that you can? Have you got every yellow line painted on the ground? Have you got every sign up that you can? Is your production management team really responding to your safety management team? Or are your safety people – are they just going around doing the tick and flick or actually being able to drive change, change cultures. But what you've got to do, you've actually got to give your safety team the confidence that they are of equal importance and standing in your work structure as the production people.

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Taking workers for the journey and making it – yeah – front of their mind is actually one of the greater challenges in business. We actually have a Stop for Safety Work Day now as part of our practice. So over the last five years we shut the factory down for two periods a day because we're on two shifts and we actually try instead of the boss ear-bashing them because that's what bosses do, we actually bring in outsiders to try and deliver a message and a different message each year. So we stop the factory, they get lunch. That's 500 people. That's not an easy process feeding 500 people and we bring on a speaker. We've had Mal Meninga when he was Safety Ambassador. We try to use people other than the boss banging the table to get the message across that we actually care about you and if we care about you maybe you'd like to care about you a little bit more as well.

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The CEO in any organisation has to lead the safety challenge in their business otherwise it's just lip service or people are doing what they feel they have to do. If it doesn't come from the top it'll take twice as long to get to the bottom. The first thing is don't give up. It's not easy. Don't do it because you have to. Do it because you want to. But you aren't on your own. There's a whole group of businesses out there that are prepared to help and pitch in so you're not on your own and it's worth doing.

Jennie Hunter

I'm pleased to introduce our next film featuring Mark Plummer, Senior Construction Manager for the Lend Lease Sunshine Coast Public University Hospital. Mark has a simple formula for leading safety – be clear about direction and expectations, use simple messages and value the input of your subcontractors.

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Mark Plummer

I'm Mark Plummer. I'm the Senior Construction Manager on for Lend Lease on the Sunshine Coast Public University Hospital. This project is a \$1.8 billion project for the Queensland Government. Sustaining the culture of safety on a project is very important and it's a challenge and so from our side of things the first thing we do is you must believe in what you're doing. You have to believe that what you're doing is the right thing.

In achieving the first million hours without a lost time injury management's component is only one part in the whole process. Our part is very much about setting the direction and the expectations that the team

have to achieve. It's about making sure the message is very concise and simple in its delivery so people understand and can follow that direction.

Maintaining the energy in safety is always a challenge on a project. You need to be at all stages holding each other accountable. So at one stage when one person drops the ball there's another person in the background backing you up. We know where our expectations are and we know where our goals are so as a team we can keep that momentum going on safety.

We have a very simple message about factory clean. We want it to look like a factory floor. So from the moment people walk on the project they see that the project is well set up and well laid out and we carry that expectation through to our subcontractors about that's how we want them to perform. So there's a fair bit of expectation management from the moment they walk on to the moment they start work on the project.

Our final part of communicating with our subcontractors and keeping them engaged is making sure that we listen to what they're saying. They know their work very well, better than we do. So it's about listening to them and making sure their concerns and comments are incorporated and addressed.

The challenge with safety is always to make sure that people feel comfortable of saying 'Hey, I don't feel safe' or 'I see it as a concern' and you need to encourage your workforce to be confident that they can stick their hand up and say 'I see a risk'. You've got to treat every comment and every concern raised as valid and address it with the respect that it deserves.

As you walk around the job you see the pride in some of the guys from what they're doing and that gives me a real buzz. I care about the guys on site. I really want to be able to go home each night and feel comfortable that we've done everything in our power to make sure that they have gone home safely.

Jennie Hunter

Our third film featuring Greg Smith, General Manager from Toll NQX introduces the idea that leading a safe business goes beyond the boundaries of the traditional operating environment. Greg shares insights into the work Toll has undertaken to improve road safety, not only for its own workforce but across the transport sector and for the broader community.

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Greg Smith

My name is Greg Smith. I'm the General Manager for Toll NQX. I've been with the business about 16 years now and in my current role for about 13. I joined the industry over 30 years ago and I began as a truck driver. I've driven trucks, I've been on forklifts. So I've got a good understanding and a very, very healthy respect for the sorts of hazards that our employees face on a day-to-day basis.

We are primarily a road transport company but we also have significant services and a coastal shipping service. Two of Toll NQX's core beliefs are firstly that everybody has the right to go home safely and secondly, that every incident is preventable. For us to live that belief it's not just about our own employees or the people that our employees engage with. The fact is that we go to all sorts of customer sites, all sorts of other transport companies. Our people are interacting with other people all the time – other businesses – and for us to enact our commitment that everyone has the right to go home safely, we have to try and make sure that everywhere that we go is at the highest possible standard from a safety perspective.

Part of what drives my actions and my belief in the need for a safe working environment is that quite some years ago one of my workmates was killed in a workplace incident and I knew all of the people who were involved at the time. I saw the damage that was done to the customer's business and the people who were involved in there, the damage that was done to the business that I was working for where my friend was

working. It had a huge impact on myself and my family. It's extreme but that very much drives my belief and my behaviour.

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We started the journey trying to develop processes and procedures and to get people to follow processes and procedures and we were successful to a point. But we didn't really get to where we believed we wanted to go. We weren't really impacting culture. What we learned is that we needed to change our approach and actually make it very, very personal. The biggest single change to our safety culture was when we made it personal and people started to understand that "If I take risks at work, I'm going to risk everything that's important to me."

Our senior management team are heavily engaged in safety and one of the things that we've begun quite recently is that each senior manager has taken on board a couple of branches. We actually now have a weekly hook-up with that branch to review the incidents in the branch, understand what initiatives are in place and just offer them support in the safety journey. What we're trying to do there is we're trying to show leadership from that senior management team but also a level of interest and engagement that can keep the message fresh. Our senior management staff, in fact all of our management staff are empowered to intervene at any time when they see something that's unsafe or could develop into an unsafe position.

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At Toll we believe we have a leadership role in the transport industry and we take that very seriously. Recently we've had the safety showcase here at our Brisbane site. We were involved in the first one of those at Port of Brisbane and it was a really good event and what we saw, there was a lot of things that were coming from other businesses and we were able to contribute significantly as well. So the opportunity to have that here on our site and have a lot of our people interact with it was just one that we couldn't miss out on. So it was about a sharing of learned experiences and we thought that was very much of value.

Another area where we believe we can take a leadership role is that we have spent some years in looking at camera technology to try and understand what's happening with our vehicles on the road. We've had a lot of our competitors come to us and actually ask us can you give us some information on the cameras, how they work, what your experiences are? We are happy to share that and have done on many occasions and it's not about proprietary information. It's actually much more about trying to make sure that the roads are safer for everybody.

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I'm particularly pleased with what we've achieved at Toll NQX. We have actually changed the culture. People are genuinely interested in coming to work and working safely for themselves, for their workmates, for their family. We have a more connected workforce, a more consistent workforce. Your people realise that you are genuinely interested in their wellbeing. So the commitment from the people has allowed us to continue to progress our safety culture which needs to continue to evolve. There is no end game. It must stay alive and it must continue to evolve.

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Simon Blackwood

The reality is the size of the safety leadership challenge facing Australian workplaces requires more than a new leadership slogan, a speech or a film. If we are to achieve real change true cultural change will take more than the commitment of senior executives driving the safety culture of an organisation.

To achieve lasting change, leaders at every level of industry from supervisors to managers must take an active role in creating good work for those they are responsible for and be capable and confident of their ability to lead safety and engage with their workforce and supply chain partners.

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