

August 2014 – If you keep doing the same things guess what?



How many organisations are currently pondering their health and safety performance statistics and looking for the 'silver bullet' answer to flat-lining performance or even worse, declining performance?

The Directors and senior managers of these organisations will, in the majority of cases, be committed to improving health and safety performance because of the moral, legal and business drivers we are all familiar with. Those that are not concerned with their poor performance are either blissfully ignorant of the issue or not bothered – neither of which are organisations I would suggest you want to be working for or with!!

Those Directors and senior managers that care and are passionate about health and safety will be increasingly frustrated and will no doubt be asking themselves and their teams a question along the lines of 'why is our performance not better'? I can almost guarantee that a lot of these organisations will have some or all of the following in-place and will proudly display lots of certificates proclaiming compliance with various accreditations:

- H&S Policy
- Health and safety procedures
- Risk assessments
- Access to competent health and safety advice (either in-house or external)
- Reporting and investigation process
- Certificates on the wall from external bodies
- Good audit outcomes
- Etc

The temptation when things are not going well is to review, re-draft and add to the Policy and procedures, to apportion blame and to add more paperwork / audits / checklists to the management system because that must make things better (and paperwork is what keeps the HSE happy isn't it)?!!!!.

Wrong answer!

Management systems, processes, audits, accreditations, etc will only ever get the organisation to a certain level of performance (hopefully compliance!). Why? Because every one of them relies on humans to interact with, understand and want to follow the written words.

Providing training, mentors and exposure to the task and the associated hazards in a controlled environment will build competence. If competence is supplemented with robust safe systems of work and effective supervision and monitoring then the organisation has the basic building blocks to move to the next stage on the safety journey (*the HSE refer to these building blocks as Information, instruction, training and supervision (IITS)*). To take the next step requires both organisational maturity and leadership commitment.

The next stage of the journey is a brave one to take and needs perseverance and a great deal of time and effort. When done well and with leadership commitment, the rewards are tangible through the usual reactive health and safety measures and outputs. However, the greatest rewards can be diverse and wide-ranging across the whole organisation when the culture means that people are committed, enthusiastic and deliver discretionary effort in everything they do.

When health and safety is a core value for the organisation this brings obvious benefits to the efficiency and profitability of the organisation as well as improved employee engagement and retention.

Why wouldn't you challenge yourself to do something different to get that desired improvement in health and safety performance?

The content of this article is intended to provide a general guide to the subject matter. Specialist advice should be sought about your specific circumstances.

Brian Cable is a Director of elnet consulting ltd