

August 2016 – Is failing less a motivating health and safety target?



Samual Beckett's famous quote is often used for motivational purposes:

“Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better”

In a lot of situations this is absolutely spot-on. Nobody should be afraid of failure. Those who fail, learn from the failure and try again will ultimately succeed. As Michael Jordan once said:

“I can accept failure, everyone fails at something. What I cannot accept is not trying”

How many organisations are purely motivated to avoid failing? Could the fear of failure explain the performance of the England football team in Euro 2016 against the minnows of Iceland?

The ex-CEO of a world-wide brand once stated "The moment avoiding failure becomes your motivation, you're down the path of inactivity. You stumble only if you're moving".

How does this apply in the context of health and safety, where the traditional measurement of success is to fail less (ie less RIDDOR events, less lost-time and non-lost-time injuries, etc).

Organisations that are hugely effective and have a high performing health and safety culture focus their efforts on building trust and providing an environment conducive to continual improvement. Results (outputs) are reviewed with a view to learning lessons to inform a vision of the objectives and to motivate action by all employees. Discretionary effort from all employees is encouraged through a culture which seeks to recognise, understand, reward and repeat great performance.

Some industries have historically been very successful in delivering safety as a core value. For example, the airline industry cannot accept failure and on the rare occasion when failure does occur it has to investigate to ensure all lessons are learnt and communicated as soon as possible. The reliability of equipment and the competence of employees to carry out tasks as expected each and every time they perform it are the reasons why the airline industry incident record is better than other forms of transport and why many of us are happy to travel by air.

Leaders must set the highest standards for health and safety, provide visible leadership and build trust with their employees so that the organisation is performing to the highest standards every minute of each and every day – no excuses.

To deliver this, leaders must understand the true performance of the business to not only communicate the vision but elaborate on the steps being taken to achieve the goals and how every employee can contribute to the achievement of those goals.

Read more of my blogs [here](#).

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.

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