

Health and safety – a priority or a core value?



How many times have you heard organisations proudly make statements similar to the following?

“Health and safety is our top priority”

“The safety of our people comes first”

“Nothing is more important than safety”

The statements are made with the best of intentions and are, in the majority of cases, sincere and genuine. However, have you ever stopped to ask what these statements really mean in the context of a health and safety culture?

Let’s start by analysing what is meant by a “priority”. The definition of a priority is *“the fact or condition of being regarded or treated as more important than others”*. That sounds OK!

But who determines the order of priorities and how do you know that your priority is the same as your colleagues? Priorities are externally imposed on us (which means they can be perceived as a “bolt-on” and therefore not real or owned by us as individuals) and can be driven by circumstances which can lead to a change in priorities. Is this how you want health and safety perceived in your organisation?

A health and safety culture needs to be much more than a priority it needs to be a **CORE VALUE**. A core value must be led from the very top of the organisation, whilst being consistently and effectively communicated and delivered throughout the organisation during every minute of every day (at home as well as at work).

Values are principles and standards that an individual or group of people may hold in high regard. They are internally derived, informed by our beliefs and therefore ingrained. Importantly, they are voluntary and only likely to change over a long period of time. Values can therefore have a strong influence over our behaviours.

Health and safety as a core value must be delivered through effective and consistent safety leadership by managers at all levels. This includes a visible commitment to health and safety and being held accountable by the company.

Build trust across your organisation to reinforce that health and safety is a core value by thinking about the following:

- Eliminate (or at least minimise) any safety vs production conflicts
- Insist managers visibly demonstrate their safety leadership
- Ensure leaders have a questioning mindset
- Hold leaders responsible for health and safety performance
- Resource, complete and monitor corrective and preventative actions
- Consistently communicate health and safety using all available mediums

- Ensure kpi's include behavioural measures
- Capture and share lessons learned

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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