

March 2014

The Chairman of the HSE, Judith Hackett, has spoken recently to the Institute of Civil Engineers (November 2013) in which she covered a range of topics ([click here for the speech](#)). In summary, the speech touched upon the following themes:

- The direct relationship between leadership commitment to safety and the positive outputs and performance that follow
- The need for safety as a core value
- Good personal / occupational safety performance is not a good indicator that high potential events will not occur
- The principles of 'Safety by Design' (ref CDM Regs)
- Never make assumptions regarding prevention of incidents
- Safety may be the first item on the Board meeting agenda, but what is getting reported and what is being measured?
- A failure to learn from events
- The need for leading indicators

There are three particular quotes from the speech that I want to focus on:

“...catastrophes can only be prevented if the potential for them to happen is recognised throughout the organisation from the very top to the very bottom – and if that recognition creates a feeling of constant unease and vulnerability, not a sense of complacency.”

“There is a strong tendency (*for businesses*) to try to pinpoint something which enables them to distance themselves from the catastrophe.”

“...that reaction is driven by the culture of the organisation and that culture is set at the very top. It is all about leadership.”

Professor Andrew Hopkins advocates a 'mindful leadership' approach to health and safety which directly address these issues. The approach from Professor Hopkins states that safety management systems are not enough on their own, there needs to be a culture of safety and this culture is created by the leadership within an organisation (ie “what they systematically pay attention to” (Schein)).

So, what is a 'mindful leader'? They are someone who is:

- Constantly pre-occupied with the possibility of something going wrong (where are the vulnerabilities?)
- Questions what layers of protection are present to prevent something going wrong and checks how robust they are?
- Questioning of constantly receiving good news from audits and reports and asks searching questions
- Visible and talks / listens to people so that they have a first-hand view of the reality of the performance within their organisation

Are you demonstrating the values of a 'mindful leader' within your organisation?

Brian Cable is a Director at elnet consulting ltd.