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## **“Safety First” Companies Go Beyond Compliance with Reliability**

Mark Latino, President, Reliability Center, Inc.

Culture matters when it comes to continuous improvement of any kind. We have all heard this over and over and most by now say yeah, so what, this place is always saying we are a safety first company but all they talk about is production and cost.

Many believe companies mean they are safety compliant and they probably are. The difference in compliance and safety first is one means the company is within the limits of the law and the other means the company is more compliant than the law requires.

This paper is about becoming a safety first company by bridging the reliability culture into the safety culture with a resulting profit from the investigation outcomes.

The reliability mission in this writers view is simple:

“The relentless pursuit to expose, understand, and correct *failure mechanisms* so the lessons learned can be transferred back into the organization as a knowledge base for continuous improvement.”

Reliability as a culture is not as prevalent in industry as one might think. In reality a true reliability culture is a significant paradigm shift. A reliability culture is about Focus, Priority, and Proaction. Most organizations are about reacting to the problem of the day, or fixing what’s broken fast.

This should not be a surprise as proaction is about soft issues and reaction is about hard issues. Soft issues are wrapped around analysis and people while hard issues are about tangibles such as fixing down equipment. The hard issues get the attention first because after the work is complete the equipment is running. Soft issues take time to show improvement. Soft issues do not provide an immediate tangible payback and therefore are seen as non-value added work.

When the reliability culture is attained the payoff in all measured areas is significant. Conservative estimates show for every dollar spent on reliability improvement there is a ten dollar return.

It isn't easy to get an organization to move all in one direction at the same time. It's kind of like the story of the ant and the elephant. The ant was born on the elephants back and of course didn't know it. One day the ant was out exploring and reached the top of the elephant's head and for the first time realized he wasn't on the ground. The ant was so small he could walk for days in the opposite direction and not be going where he wanted to go because the elephant being so much larger controlled the direction. The predicament for the ant was to find a way to communicate with the elephant so the ant could get the elephant to want to move in the direction the ant wanted to go.

Industry has the same kinds of problems. The corporations are so large that communication can be misinterpreted very easily. The message from the corporate offices is much like the elephant, we hear it, we interpret what we hear, and pass it down to the next level in the organization. As each level interprets the message we end up with "all they really care about is production and cost" which was not the intention of the original communication.

In many cases, people in the organization have better ways of attaining the company goals but the message that passes in the opposite direction to the corporate offices is not heard. The people in the organization are kind of like the ant, saying how do we communicate the message to the corporate offices so we all move in the same direction?

The reason for using this analogy is because the safety message from corporate is often about compliance. It is important to be compliant with the law, but it is just as important to implement recommendations that eliminate problems. Many times safety issues resurface because the recommendations were superficial like; a written warning was issued, refresher training was administered, a training tape about the subject was administered, and the like. Even though the recommendations didn't correct the issue the reporting was compliant with regulations.

In the reliability world the investigation for the same incident would have been driven much deeper into the system issues that allowed the potential for

the incident to exist at all. By driving investigations to uncover not only the physical reasons for the incident like the guard was missing. It must also uncover the human reasons for approaching the situation in the manner in which it was under the conditions that were present (the guard was sent to the shop for repair and the equipment was left running because we didn't want to lose any production besides it was only going to take a few minutes). When the human reasoning is exposed the flawed systems will be known and recommendations that can eliminate the human potential for error can be put in place (a procedure for repairing guards is not in place and should be, or there are spare guards so that it is never an option to leave equipment left running unguarded, etc.)

When the message is embraced at the corporate levels and the communication becomes "this company's mission is to be more compliant than the law requires." Our objective is not to only be within the limits of the law but to be so reliable that accidents are no longer significant in nature. Our safety focus is to be proactive to the point potential dangers can be identified and corrected before they can become activated.

For example, when safety and reliability become synonymous with one another a paradigm shift is being witnessed. When employees are seen demonstrating proactive decisions to avoid undesirable situations such as removing a ladder left behind from a previous job. Other active signs may include things like when employees see a violation and peers remind each other they are committing a violation, following lock out tag out procedures, not beginning work until all is safe, and the like.

The safety mission can be similar to the reliability mission. The mission could read "The relentless pursuit to expose, understand, and correct *failure mechanisms* associated with undesirable events that cause injury, environmental mishaps, and property damage. The lessons learned from such events will be transferred back into the organization as a knowledge base for continuous improvement."

True Root Cause Analysis (RCA) will not only meet compliance standards but will allow companies to drive the investigation much deeper. The RCA tool used as designed will uncover deeply rooted organizational system flaws, and when corrected, will bring the organization to an unprecedented high level of reliability. The more reliable the assets the less human interaction is necessary which equates to a safer work environment as well

as consistent predictable production. To have predictable asset availability is a competitive edge as well as a profit center.

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*About the Author*

*Mr. Latino is President of North American operations for Reliability Center, Inc. (RCI). Mark came to RCI after 19 years in corporate America. During those years a wealth of reliability, maintenance, and manufacturing experience was acquired. He worked for Weyerhaeuser Corporation in a production role during the early stages of his career. He was an active part of Allied Chemical Corporation's (Now Honeywell) Reliability "Strive for Excellence" initiative that was started in the 70's to define, understand, document, and live the reliability culture until he left in 1986. Mr. Latino spent 10 years with Philip Morris primarily in a production capacity that later ended in a reliability engineering role. He is a graduate of Old Dominion University and holds a BS Degree in Business Management that focused on Production & Operations Management.*