

# First Thursday Safety Topic

## July 2019



### Safety Checks and Balances

By Carl Potter, CSP, CMC

*This used to be a government of checks and balances. Now it's all checks and no balances*  
- Gracie Allen

The United States Government was built on the idea of checks and balances so that someone was continually checking the assumptions, intentions, and actions of others. In safety there is such a need because like any other type of organization yours is one made of human beings who approach safety with their own ideas and viewpoints. When it comes to taking action to maintain the safety standards everyone has their own idea and typically they think they are correct.

Nobody is right or wrong 100% of the time. The old joke that *even a clock is correct twice a day* comes to mind.

There are three things that can happen when you don't check your organization's assumptions about safety.

1. The safety culture you worked hard to improve has slipped back
2. Leadership commitment to injury prevention is reduced
3. Worker belief that safety is just given lip service increases

As I have said many times, *every organization has a safety culture... it is a matter of identifying what the culture is and if it is what you want it to be that matters most.* A safety culture operates on a balancing scale between what it is and what you want it to be. I call this *current state* and *desired state*. Taking time to check your safety culture annually is a good idea to make sure you have moved it forward from where it was 12 months earlier. However, production and profit are

insidious hazards to a successful safety culture because the financial numbers become more emotional than safety.

Leadership at the highest level have a responsibility to keep the organization fiscally healthy. When budgets get tight, typically cuts start at non-required training, driving the decision to take an approach of simply *checking the boxes* for safety training. Without fiscal responsibility the organization can literally go out of business and nobody wants to lose their job. The belief becomes one of *safety if we can afford it* at the ground level where the hazards for injuries exist. Many organizations that have spent many years and dollars to improve their safety culture will not see the slip until it is back to where it began.

Worker belief in what the organization stands for and expects of them is critical to attaining, maintaining and sustaining a successful safety culture. This belief must be driven by leadership so that workers *hear and see* the commitment of leadership so that they make decisions that reduce the risk of injury as they conduct work at the grass-roots level.

*When you really listen to another person from their point of view, and reflect back to them that understanding, it's like giving them emotional oxygen.*  
- Stephen Covey

To really know where you are and identify where you want to go, you have to listen to the organization. For leadership and workers alike, this can be tough. Those who are in responsible positions may think they got where they are by their own wisdom. Wisdom comes from many counselors. Successful organizations are continually checking their assumptions and taking the time and effort to have an annual check up. When I am working with a client to identify their current state and their desired

state I have to listen. This comes from crafting specific questions and then taking notes to see what is said. Interestingly enough there is a measured improvement when members of an organization are given the opportunity to speak out about their beliefs, observations, and personal actions.

Each and every person contributes to the safety culture. Interviewing both groups and individuals provide a point of view that can then paint a picture telling the organization where they are in relation to where they want to be. Numbers such as injury rates, days away, and preventable vehicle accidents tell a story, but it can be wrong and lead the organization to enter a downward spiral with regards to their safety culture. *What can be done?*

The best idea is to use outside help just like we do when we are getting a physical, mental, or financial check-up. Doctors and advisors have a responsibility to tell you what you might not want to hear by telling you what is high, low, or just right. Using that information they can predict what your future holds if you stay on the same path of behavior. Some organizations conduct their own internal checks and balances, but who is checking their assumptions.

I am big on helping clients to measure what they can by implementing some tools that keep them within boundaries throughout the year. On an annual basis though an organization should conduct a checks and balances of the progress made. This starts by creating a point of beginning so there's a reference point established and agreed upon. Once this is done your organization can begin to improve your safety culture by targeting every workplace injury, so that nobody gets hurt.

Email Carl at: [carl@safetyinstitute.com](mailto:carl@safetyinstitute.com) if you would like to discuss having he and his team conduct a third party Safety Check-up for your organization.

## NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

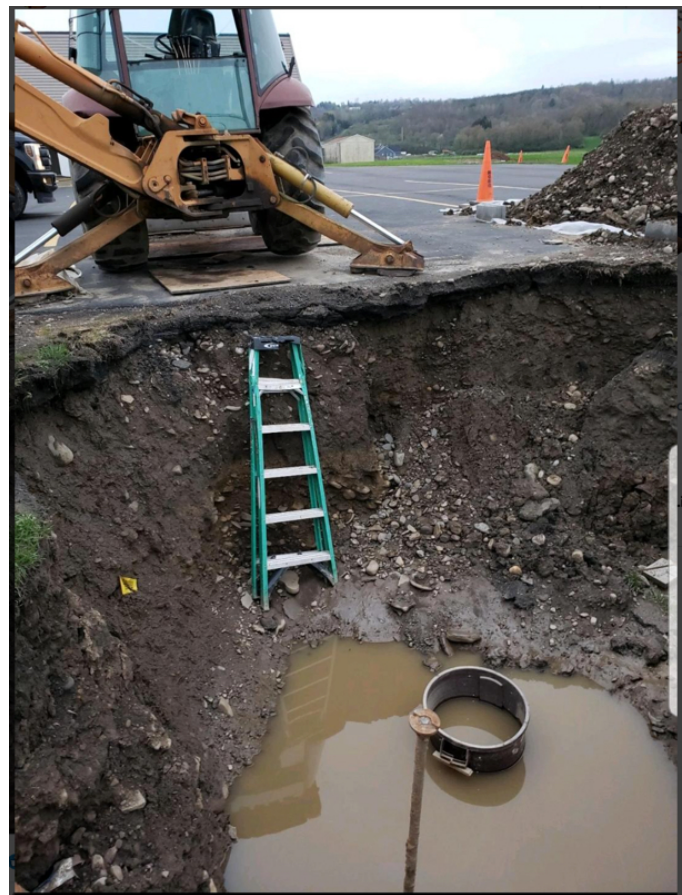
---

---

---

---

---



*What's the Hazard?*