# Lessons I Have Learnt about Management, Safety, Life and People

**Because they go to work in Australia, 10 people per hour, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year have their lives permanently altered (Geoff McDonald)**

## INITIATING CHANGE

- When initiating change remember "People support what they create"

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## Introduction

Now I am old and decrepit I have had the chance to reflect on the many mistakes I have made in my life and articulate a number of lessons learnt. A little bit has come from reading and study but most of it comes from working with 3 wise leaders and critical reflection on practical experience. It is a personal document, what I regard as lessons for me may not be lessons for you and you may disagree with some of it. Many of the lessons have been learnt the hard way.

This is the fourth of 4 safety e books, the first is Guidance for the beginning OHS professional, the second Broader management skills for the OHS professional and the third What it means to be an OHS professional. The papers What makes a safety management system fly, 30 ways to stuff up a safety management system and What you need to know about health & safety leadership (Available on request to fgrobotham@gmail.com )have also proved popular.

## Lesson 1 - What you do

People judge you by what they see you doing not by what you say you are doing. Treating people with the upmost respect at all times is essential.

<u>Quotable Quote</u>

"The people are fashioned according to the example of their king and edicts are less powerful than the life (example) of the king" *Claudian, c. 365, Egyptian epic poet*

Many years ago in a mine safety job one of the supervisors used to say I would never have credibility as a safety officer as long as I smoked. He was not right then but I suspect he would be right now. I know being overweight for many of my years in safety has not improved my credibility.

Be careful of the image you project, perception is often reality.

## **Lesson 2 - Change**

It is rare for organisational change to be effective if those affected by the change process are not fully involved in the change process. "When initiating change remember, People support what they create." The 6 P rule is very important in change - Prior Preparation and Planning Prevents Poor Performance.

Attempting too big a change and / or changing things too quickly can create an adverse reaction and alienate the very people you want to make allies. Learn the context, culture and past before trying to make changes. Unless a crisis situation is apparent realise effective change requires a lot of effort and time.

John P. Kotter speaks of 8 steps for successful large scale change - Increase urgency, Build the guiding team, Get the vision right, Communicate for buy-in, Empower action, Create short-term wins, Do not let up, Make change stick. These steps provide useful, practical guidance.

<u>Organisational change management theory</u>

The following is a summation of the major principles of organisational change that I believe can be applied to OHS work. Safety professionals wanting more information on change management should type "change management" and "organisational change" into Google and search for other interesting and informative information about these important business concepts.

Experienced safety professionals will recognise the relevance to safety change in the three change management practices outlined by Perkins.

Managing cultural change requires three things- management commitment, universal approval and appropriate measures and rewards.

<u>Management commitment</u>

In order for anything to happen in an enterprise, including change, executives and managers must be consistently committed to make it happen. Only enterprise leaders can ensure the resources necessary to effect the changes are available. Leaders must continuously and obviously support the changes. The visibility of leadership support is a primary factor in achieving universal approval for change.

## Universal approval

Internal change is successful only when the people involved approve of the change.

- They understand the need for change.
- They believe the change is good for the enterprise and for them.
- They agree that the change being undertaken is the right one.

## Measures and rewards

Getting everyone to want change is difficult. It requires a level and degree of communication not found in many enterprises. The best way to get and maintain universal approval is to ensure the process and results of change are measured appropriately and accurately and communicated enterprise-wide. Good results and changed behaviour must be rewarded. At the same time, unchanged behaviour and poor results should not be rewarded. Employees will not work toward change if they continue to be rewarded for old practices.

Various writers have dealt with the vital nature of management commitment in safety. It is very easy for management to say it is committed to safety; it is harder to provide a high profile demonstration of that commitment. Safety will only be successful when all are on board and agreeing with safety change. Safety must be measured, preferably using positive performance measures and people must receive intrinsic rather than monetary awards for their successful performance.

The Web tools newsletter identifies factors identified as fostering successful change regimes.

1. There is an executive commitment to change – a necessary condition
2. The plan is generally perceived to be well-developed and appropriate to the purpose
3. The organisation is amenable to change
4. Individuals are willing to change (though some personality types resist change)
5. The need for change is readily acknowledged
6. The organisation has a culture of embracing change – linked to 3
7. Employees trust management to act in their best interests
8. The organisation enjoys a history of successful change
9. Management is capable of implementing change
10. There is effective management control

11. Arrangements are flexible enough to accommodate structural change
12. Clear direction and authority ensures that executive policy translates accurate feedback on progress of implementation
13. Standards are enforced
14. There is systematic motivation – determined by:
15. Equity – perceptions of inequity or double standards diminish morale and motivation
16. Appropriate rewards for performance supporting change initiatives
17. Expectations of successful outcomes
18. Expectations that good employee performance will be recognised

Refer to the paper OHS Organisational Change Principles for more detail and the references

# CHANGE

- "There is nothing so difficult as initiating change"   Michavelli



## Lesson 3 - Communication

"Nothing is more central to an organisation's effectiveness than its ability to transmit accurate, relevant and understandable information among its members." There is a big difference between saying you have open communications and actually achieving it.  Keep all your communications simple.

Senior management road shows talking about major issues are often perceived as a bit of a joke by the workforce. Use the supervisor to communicate change to the workforce.

Keep written communications focussed and succinct. Busy people do not have time to read lengthy documents and busy people do not have time to write them. Always check for understanding. Produce and create an expectation of receiving succinct written communication.

Where ever possible use face to face communication, it is a big mistake to rely on e-mails for communicating major issues. Frame communications relevant to the receivers work environment.

As a young bloke my father told me if you are going to be a bull dust artist you have to be incredibly good at it and have a phenomenal memory or you will be found out eventually.

Keep it succinct

The biggest problem with written communications is its length; generally I think you must try to get your routine messages across in a maximum of 2 pages. Busy people do not have time to write more and busy people do not have the time to read more. Concentrate on the MUST KNOWS. I am sure some safety people must be paid by the word, the result is long ponderous written communications. You can be certain that if it is too much like hard work to read it will not be read.

Professor T.J. Larkin's book *Communicating Change.*

After receiving their communications employees should return to their jobs, change their behaviour and perform better. The change should be immediate and measurable. If the communication changes behaviour it is good communication, if it does not it is bad communication.

The goal of communication is improving performance, it should change the way employees do their job. If communication is to change behaviour it must be grounded in the interests and desires of the receiver. To be noticed communications must contain something that interests the receiver and touches their values. Communication must be what interests the frontline employees not the bosses.

There are 3 very important principles for effective workforce communications -

1. Use the supervisor not management
2. If it is not face to face it is not communications
3. Focus on the local work area

Effective communications

**Effective communication skills are fundamental to success in many aspects of life.** Lots of jobs require strong communication skills and socially people with improved communication skills usually have better interpersonal relationships. **Communication is a two way process so improving communication involves both how we send and receive messages.**

Improving communications

▪ Try to see things from the point of view of others
▪ Offer words of encouragement and praise. Make others feel wanted, valued and appreciated.

- Learn to listen - Listen to the words being spoken, how they are spoken and non-verbal messages
- Use your listening skills to understand both sides of an argument. Encourage people to talk to each other.
- Use humour - No one likes sad people. Try to be friendly, upbeat and positive. If you smile and stay cheerful people are more likely to respond positively to you.
- Minimise stress - Try to remain calm and focused
- Only complain when necessary - People will not be drawn to you if you are always complaining. If you must complain focus on the issue not the person

Conclusion

Communications skills are a key requirement for OHS personnel; you are encouraged to learn about them. Techniques such as force-field analysis can open up communications channels. Appropriate self-disclosure and reflective listening are an aid to communications and building interpersonal relationships. (See the papers Force-Field Analysis, Communications Skills, Interpersonal Skills)

**Lesson 4 - Trust**

A lack of open communications will inevitably lead to the development of a lack of trust amongst some of the organisations members. Organisation leaders will find when trust goes out the door the perception of their messages will become skewed. *People Skills* by Bolton is a must read for most people, it has good information on the nature of trust.

**Book Review** - *Trust and Betrayal in the Workplace - Building Effective Relationships in Your Organisation* By D& M Reina

Trust

One thing that runs through the leadership literature is the vital importance of trust. I have worked for a few people I did not trust and had a few occasions when people have acted like they did not trust me. Lack of trust ruins relationships and erodes effective management of organisations. I recently came across the text Trust And Betrayal In The Workplace-Building Effective Relationships in Your Organisation. It is a 250 page book, easy to read, practical and contains some excellent advice for OHS personnel. There is good discussion early up about the nature of trust and betrayal.

Trust Model

The authors present a 3 part trust model

1. Contractual trust-Manage expectations, establish boundaries, delegate appropriately, encourage mutually serving intentions, keep agreements, and be consistent.
2. Communication trust-Share information, tell the truth, admit mistakes, give and receive constructive feedback, maintain confidentiality, speak with good purpose.

3. Competence trust-Acknowledge peoples skills and abilities, allow people to make decisions.

Advice is given on how to practically introduce the above types of trust.

Rebuilding and Sustaining Trust

One part of the book talks about how rebuild and sustain trust once it has broken down.

Some of the ways betrayal may occur include; disclosing corporate secrets, sabotaging corporate data, restructuring resulting in layoffs, delegating without giving authority, gossiping and backbiting, accepting credit for others work, repeatedly arriving late for work, not keeping agreements.;

Healing Betrayal

The authors talk about steps for healing betrayal

- Observe and acknowledge what has happened
- Allow feelings to surface
- Get support
- Reframe the experience
- Take responsibility
- Forgive yourself and others
- Let go and move on

There is discussion on how to practically implement the above.

Conclusion

Trust is vital in all relationships. This book offers easy to understand, practical advice on building and sustaining trust. It is not often that I come across a book I would recommend to fellow OHS people but this is one.

## Lesson 5 - General Colin Powell

General Colin Powell is reported as saying you should worry when soldiers no longer come to you with their problems. This is because they have either concluded that you cannot help or you do not care, either is a crisis in leadership.

Colin Powell on Leadership

Baraka Training and Management present a power point interview with General Colin Powell on leadership. It's fantastic, down to earth, practical advice from a real leader. The following summarises the key points.

- Good leadership involves responsibility for the welfare of the group
- Being responsible means sometimes pissing people off
- Do not be buffaloed by experts and elites

- Never neglect details
- Keep looking below surface appearances
- Organisation charts and fancy titles mean next to nothing
- Fit no stereotypes
- Look for people with intelligence and judgement
- Great leaders are almost always great simplifiers
- The commander in the field is always right
- Have fun
- Command is lonely
- Leadership is the art of accomplishing what the science of management says is not possible

## Lesson 6 - Leadership

General Norman Schwarzkopf said "Failures in leadership are invariably failures in character, not competence" The biggest test of a leader's ability that he / she will be judged by is how he / she reacts in a crisis. Leadership is the often forgotten key to excellence in most facets of life. Formal and informal leaders will benefit from leadership learning.

The role of leaders in safety change

Krause (2004) speaks of nine factors that predict positive safety outcomes

1. Procedural justice
   Does the individual perceive that the supervisor's decision-making process to be fair?
1. Leader member exchange
   If employees believe the supervisor will provide support and look out for their interests positive results will be found
2. Management credibility
   Do employees perceive that what management says is consistent with what it does?
3. Perceived organizational support
   Do employees perceive that they receive the support they need to accomplish the organisation's objectives?
4. Workgroup relations
   Do co-workers treat each other with respect, listen to each other's ideas, help one another out and fulfil commitments?
5. Teamwork
   To what extent do employees perceive that working with team members is an effective way to complete tasks?
6. Organisational value for safety performance improvement
   The more employees perceive that the organization values safety goals, the more willing they will be to invest in those goals themselves.
7. Upward communication
   Can the workers speak freely to their supervisor about safety concerns?
8. Approaching others

Do employees feel free to speak to each other about safety concerns?

Krause (2004) describes what excellent safety leadership looks like

1. Vision
   The most senior executive must "see" what safety excellence looks like. The leader must convey his vision in a compelling manner through action.
2. Credibility
   When an excellent safety leader says something others believe it and do not question his motives.
3. Collaboration
   Collaboration encompasses working well with others encouraging input, helping others, expressing confidence in others support others decisions and gaining commitment.
4. Feedback and Recognition
   An excellent safety leader provides effective feedback and recognises people for their accomplishments.
5. Accountability
   An excellent safety leader gives workers a fair appraisal of safety efforts and results, clearly communicates people's roles in safety and fosters the sense that people are responsible for the level of safety in their organisational unit.
6. Communication
   As a great communicator the leader encourages people to deliver honest, complete information about safety (even if unfavourable) keeps people informed and communicates frequently and effectively up, down and across the organisation.
7. Values Safety
   An excellent safety leader acts to support safety values and principles. He leads by example and clearly communicates that safe behaviour is expected.
8. Action-oriented
   An excellent safety leader is proactive rather than reactive in addressing safety issues. He gives timely, considered responses to safety concerns, demonstrates a sense of personal energy and urgency to achieve safety results and demonstrates a performance driven focus by delivering results with speed and excellence.

What the OHS Professional Can Do To Improve Safety Leadership

1. Learn as much as you can about general and safety leadership. Reference to the sources of information in this paper will help.
2. Carry out a survey to identify the workforce perception of company leadership, there are various ways of going about this. Sometimes there is value in collating the answers onto histograms, displaying the histograms to the people who completed the survey, discussing the results and trying to establish why the responses are the way they are. This is best done by as senior a managers as possible who does not react defensively to criticism.

3. Survey the leadership styles of your leaders, various instruments are available. Carrying out a force field analysis on safety leadership may help to focus issues.
4. Identify the relevant learning needs of leaders using a formalized learning needs analysis.
5. Based on the above develop a safety leadership project plan in association with the stakeholders. Form a project team to manage the plan. Get management approval for the plan.
6. Launch and communicate the safety leadership project plan. My general advice with communication is to use face to face communication wherever possible, use the powerful influence of the work group supervisor and frame communication relevant to the work environment of the group being communicated to. High powered communications from senior management about the goals, mission, vision and the objectives of the company will not have much of an impact with many of the workers.
7. Carry out interactive leadership learning using Action and Experiential learning models. The learning must have a focus on the reality of the workplace. My advice is to check out both the process and content of potential providers very carefully, there are some snake oil salesmen in this space. I know it is not everybody's thing but properly structured outdoor learning experiences can be a powerful means of leadership learning. Just ensure the focus is on the learning not the outdoor experience.
8. As a follow up to learning facilitation engage in authentic safety leadership tasks / activities / projects in the workplace. Progress must be regularly discussed, reviewed and evaluated, celebrate the success of these. McDonalds use WOW projects in their leadership learning.
9. Meet with the people who attended the learning facilitation and discuss what is going well and what opportunities for improvement have been presented. I know it is not everybody's thing but I encourage leaders to maintain a reflective journal about their leadership experiences, used properly this can be a powerful means of learning.
10. Evaluate, communicate and celebrate success. Establish what was learnt in the process and how you would do it better next time.

The Top 10 Things that are Essential for Safety Leadership

1. Leaders must visibly demonstrate commitment and focus on safety. Good leaders lead, great leaders develop other leaders.
2. Leaders must set the safety example.
3. Leaders must create high safety expectations.
4. High values and detailed standards of performance must be used
5. Leaders must listen to and involve the workforce
6. Leaders must do what they say they will do.
7. Leaders must value safety goals.
8. Employees must be made to feel they are part of something important and satisfying.
9. Leaders must reinforce, reward and celebrate success.
10. Everyone must be held accountable for safety performance.

"Good leaders are those who know how to motivate and challenge people at all levels of an organisation to achieve their best performance. In addition they support and provide the resources necessary to ensure it is possible to meet the goals that have been set".

"What good leaders do is create an environment that allows people to do their jobs effectively and with confidence and in my time I have developed 5 rules.

1. Agree with people what is expected of them;
2. Give them the knowledge to do what is expected of them;
3. Give them the tools to do what is expected of them;
4. Give them permission to do what is expected of them; and
5. Monitor them to see if they are actually doing what is expected of them. If they are, then give them a big pat on the back. If they are not talk to them and find out what is not happening and point them in the right direction.

The final thing good leaders do is have a vision and are consistent in moving toward fulfilling that vision. They do not make decisions based on opportunism"

## Lesson 7 - Biggest Bang

Do the things that give you the biggest bang for your buck. OHS does not have a lot of credibility in the eyes of many managers, often this is because OHS people embark on emotive causes that have little real return to the business. There is some real bull dust associated with OHS that can give you a loving, caring, sharing feeling but return bugger all to the business. There are a number of safety fads promoted by smooth talking marketing people that will cost you a lot of money to implement. You need to look through the gloss and evaluate what you will get for your money. It pays to get some runs on the board quickly.

## Lesson 8 - Bureaucracy

Minimise the bureaucracy, paperwork and bull dust. In my experience, government departments in particular suffer from problems in this area.

One organisation I worked for had the idea that the way to implement safety change was to develop a detailed, multi-page policy statement and e mail it out. The policy statements were long and ponderous, in an advanced level of English and very few people ever put in the very hard work required to read them. There was no training in the policy and the people who were to enact the policy, front line workers, had little e mail access.

Complicated workplace systems can become too difficult for employees to manage and they just give up trying. Good leaders are good simplifiers.

### Lesson 9 - Simple Things

Do the simplest thing that will work. Effective systems are a trade off between simplicity and complexity. Systems have to be complex enough that they have identified and meet needs yet simple enough that they are not a big ask to implement.

### Lesson 10 - Relationships

Remember it is the relationships you build combined with your technical skills that determine success – either alone will not guarantee success. No matter what you do the people issues will be the most important ones in your world. Getting away and having some assessment of your personality style is important for you to understand how you relate to others. This is an area that is often overlooked in tertiary, technical education but it is vital, you probably need to attend a few short courses. People Skills by Bolton is very powerful, you really need to do the exercises to get the best value out of it.

### Lesson 11 - Goals

Have huge but realistic goals with set timelines. Without articulated goals you do not know where you are going.

### Lesson 12 - Needs Analysis / Learning

Whatever you do, but particularly learning, must have a needs analysis as a pre-cursor. Encourage your staff to be lifelong learners. Use Action & Experiential learning models and avoid lecture style presentations. The key to successful facilitation is to encourage critical reflection and make your sessions highly interactive. (See the papers Adult Learning Principles and Process and Learning Needs Analysis)

Training is what others do to us; learning is what we do to ourselves. You should learn a little, well.

### Lesson 13 - Expectations

Communicate your expectations and react when they are and not met. Manage by walking around and see for yourself what is going on in your organisation. Get out of the office and into the field. Force yourself to tour work areas and talk to the workforce on a regular bases.

### Lesson 14 - Feedback

Ask for and give regular feedback.

### Lesson15 - Outcomes

Focus on the outcome and use team building approaches with your teams. Project teams, properly selected and led, with a detailed project plan can be a great way of driving significant change. Empowering the workforce is the trend, there will be some in the workforce who do not want to be empowered and are quite content with taking direction from a supervisor they respect.

**Lesson 16 - Quality**

In the 1990's BHP-Coal introduced what was arguably the most robust quality system in Australian industry at the time. The continuous improvement message was very vigorously incorporated in every aspect of the business. Since leaving BHP I have worked for organisations with no quality system, a quality system in name only even if it may have been successfully audited and effective quality systems. The most striking problem with organisations with no quality system or a poor quality system is the lack of a continuous improvement philosophy. Sensible quality systems, provided they are not overdone, can add much needed rigor to many management disciplines.

**Lesson 17 - Humour**

The use of humour in everyday interactions can boost communication and interpersonal skills. (Refer to the paper The Use of Humour)

**Lesson 18 - Tough on Task**

Be tough on the task but gentle on yourself and others

**Lesson 19 - Challenge the Status Quo**

Challenging the status quo is very satisfying but needs to be approached with sensitivity in some environments. Be prepared to get in the poop. It is often easier to ask for forgiveness than permission. Challenging the status quo has risks but is better than putting up with fools and mediocrity; it is also a hell of a lot of fun when you get away with it! It is hard to soar like an eagle when you are surrounded by pigeons

**Lesson 20 - People Management**

The greatest motivator is not money. It is the opportunity to learn, grow in responsibilities, to contribute and be recognised.

Recruitment & selection uses "**Past behaviour predicts future behaviour**" The idea is to give plenty of examples of where in the past you have **successfully done the sort of things that you  will be required to do in the new job**. Say what you did, how you did it and what the results were.

Despite sophisticated recruitment and selection techniques organisations often end up with people working for them that are so useless they should be strung up by delicate parts of their anatomy. Once you get them it is hard to get rid of them. Job interviews, in isolation are notoriously ineffective, having the person being interviewed carry out an authentic task helps.

**Lesson 21 - Strategy**

Strategy is important but make sure you spend sufficient time in the field that you do not lose sight of the reality of how the organisation is being managed. People in corporate roles are often out of touch with reality.

**Lesson 22 - Theory**

Theory is important; but constantly ask yourself if this will work in the real world.

**Lesson 23 - Doing the Impossible**

It is kind of fun to do the impossible. There have been occasions in my life when someone telling me I cannot do something has been the impetus for me doing it. Achieving against the odds gives a fantastic feeling of accomplishment. The key is to get a good team around you.

**Lesson 24 - Loyalty**

Reward loyalty or you will lose good people. People do not need to be managed; they need to have their potential unleashed. A quality I have seen in the 3 outstanding leaders I have worked with is that they were very loyal to their team members, stuck up for them and developed them. There will be crisis situations in life and loyalty shown will be reciprocated.

**Lesson 25 - Mistakes**

Admit your mistakes. Do not make excuses or blame others. I used to have a boss who claimed his mistakes were mine and my successes were his. He lost all credibility in my eyes. Whatever project you undertake it is good to have an ending review of what went well and what opportunities for improvement were presented. Admitting your mistakes, provided you have a plan to rectify them, is a sign of strength not weakness. Admitting your mistakes is a gutsy move and will enhance your credibility.

**Lesson 26 - Success**

The only place where Success comes before Work is in the dictionary. The most successful safety initiatives I have introduced have come from the establishment of special project teams. Project teams can have significant synergy and enhance your efforts. Whatever you are doing a well thought out plan with time lines for deliverables is essential.

**Lesson 27 - S.A.S.**

The motto of the Australian S.A.S. regiment is "Who Dares Wins" I am generally a believer in the S.A.S. motto but an uncle of mine who worked with the S.A.S. in Vietnam said they were too dangerous to be around because they took unnecessary risks. Some balance is necessary.

**Lesson 28 - Thanks**

Catch people doing well and make a fuss of them, routinely thank people for their efforts. You will be amazed at how the simple act of saying thank you will boost your credibility and interpersonal relationships.

**Lesson 29 - Teambuilding**

Encourage team members to discuss issues, including work and personal problems with you. Adopt the roles of mentor / coach / advisor as well as team leader. Conducting a team building activity with a newly formed team is essential. Regular reviews of team effectiveness are vital. I have found well developed adventure based training is great for team building.

## Lesson 30 - Lifelong learner

You have to resolve to be a life-long learner; often learning in fields allied to your major discipline will increase your effectiveness in your major discipline.

- Be a sponge and soak up all the knowledge and experience you can. Never be scared to ask for advice and experience, never stop learning. Finding yourself a mentor will be of real value and constantly discuss issues with your peers.
- Deliberately ask for the hard jobs. Putting yourself out of your comfort zone is a great way to learn and do not be afraid to fail. Failure is a great way to learn.
- Start your learning at the level you can handle. Simple principles can be easily learnt, you don't need to be an academic.
- Join some of the LinkedIn OHS forums, networking with peers can be a great way to learn
- Personally I think maintaining a reflective journal is a good way to learn.
- Safety is in everything we do and say. Read widely and look for safety management and skill in everything you read. The local library will have many management books that are useful in safety.
- Undertake a formal OHS qualification, even if it is only a Cert IV. Your employers are looking for formal qualification. Do your due diligence and ensure you check out any courses you are interested in with anyone you can find who has had past or present experience in those courses. Don't take the reply from any one person as gospel, seek as many replies as practical and sift out the consistency in what they say.
- Get a tertiary OHS qualification, ensure you check out any courses you are interested in with past or present learners. Distance education has advantages for some but there may not end up being much interaction with fellow learners.
- Assess if there is tertiary learning in non-safety disciplines that can aid your safety journey
- Attend Cert IV T.A.E. Despite the fact this qualification is only a learner's permit it is what many employers want
- Attend short course learning on leadership, organisational change, communications skills, interpersonal skills, project management, quality management, basic human resource management, critical thinking and basic marketing.

## Lesson 31 - Deal with the Issue

Deal with the issue not the person. Getting people to improve their performance on a whole range of issues can be difficult and discussion can become heated. It is essential to focus on

the issue of concern rather than the person. This takes an important distance from the individual and tends to defuse tension.

## Lesson 32 - Displacement Activities

Displacement activities are things we do, things we put a lot of energy into but which there is little valid reason for doing them. Some occupations are full of displacement activities.

The prime example of a displacement activity in safety I can think of is the language and philosophy of zero harm. Lots of companies use it, some government departments promote it, some safety people argue passionately for it. If you took it away, nothing would change.

I was approached by a senior manager of a large Qld organization to help him prepare a presentation to the board to get rid of zero harm; he was going to tell the board zero harm was doing more harm than good. It was clear the employees thought noise about zero harm was garbage and management propaganda. The employees thought the goal was unrealistic and unachievable and that it had driven accident reporting was being driven underground. It has become clear that the organization had lost its focus on serious risk and safety issues and was expending excessive resources on inconsequential things.

There you go, that's a displacement activity. If you want to work out what a displacement activity is, just take it out of the equation and see if it makes any difference. If there's no difference than whatever that activity is, it's probably a waste of time.

## Lesson 33 - Least Time, Least Effort

Given a choice the human being will usually opt for the least time, least effort way of doing things. Introducing complexity often makes things too much like hard work and it will not happen. When you are investigating accidents remember the least time, least effort approach, often this is the reason why the silly bugger did what he did, often this is well intentioned and done for what are perceived to be good reasons.

## Lesson 34 - Taking Things Personally

Allowing setbacks to be taken personally wastes a lot of your time and can cause you aggravation. Keep an appropriate distance. OHS personnel are generally very caring and dedicated people and it can be very upsetting when serious accidents occur or you otherwise do not achieve your objectives. An important part of doing a professional job is not to get overcome by the situation. You are no use to anyone if you let your emotions take charge

## Lesson 35 -Public Masturbation

Realise and manage the fact that some in management and safety positions engage in acts of public masturbation. I have seen people do some incredibly stupid things in the same of safety, often using significant resources and money. Many of the things that are done in traditional safety have very little return on investment. Various fads crop up from time to

time marked by smooth talking marketing people dressed up as safety people, you need to look through the gloss and determine the real benefits.

## Lesson 36 - Class I Damage

Concentrate on analysis of Class 1 (Permanently life altering) personal damage. This is best done through industry taxonomies (Collections of like) using standardised industry reporting schemes.

1.    Damage to people at work has a number of adverse outcomes:-

- Financial loss to employer, worker and community
- Pain and suffering
- Dislocation of lives
- Permanence of death

2.    Damage to people from work falls naturally into one of three Classes.

- Class I damage permanently alters the person's life and subdivides into
  - fatal
  - non fatal
- Class II damage temporarily alters the person's life
- Class III damage temporarily inconveniences the person's life (Geoff McDonald & Associates)


Some people indicate a fixation and emphasis on minor personal damage. In terms of cost and suffering Class I personal damage far outweighs Class II and class III. We get to hear about some of the fatal class I damage but little is known about the massive area of non-fatal class I damage. If you are talking about getting the best bang for your buck you must focus on class I personal damage.

## Lesson 37 - Engage with Your People

Engage with your people. Conducting problem solving groups, using techniques such as Force Field Analysis and other techniques to be found in the book Teachers as Facilitators by Dr. Merv Wilkinson, Catalyst of change, can be very powerful. Successful safety is about the relationships you build. Get to know your people

## Lesson 38 - You will get Nowhere Without Highly Visible Management Commitment and Leadership

Then there was my manager, Greg. I organised an outside training organisation to conduct training for health and safety representatives. Early in the course the instructor asked me to come over and talk to the participants who raised a number of quite reasonable safety issues

with me. Some were within my power to fix so we discussed how to fix them. Some required management action so I asked Greg to attend. Well what a circus! We lost count of the number of times he told us how committed to safety he was, we also lost count of the even greater number of times he refused to commit to positive action to address the issues. In the end the group lost patience with Greg and told him to leave and stop wasting their time. The course instructor, a highly qualified OHS professional, was dumbfounded by the performance Greg put on and asked me where I had got him from. It was not long after this that I resigned; I figured I was wasting my time with a manager like Greg.

## Lesson 39 - Ethics

Be highly ethical in everything you do, if you are not you will be found out eventually. The business, sporting and political worlds are full of otherwise highly capable leaders who failed spectacularly because of ethics

## Lesson 40 - Work / Life Balance

Have a good work / life balance, celebrate success, do not take yourself or your work too seriously, leave lots of time for friends and family, go camping in the bush or on the beach and have a pet

## Conclusion

Well the above are the lessons I have learnt. The paper Key Management Concepts goes into a bit more detail on broader topics. One thing I read gave me a bit of a laugh- Remember when thinking about leadership-**Ducks quack, Eagles soar.**

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