



Accountability for Health & Safety

BY CORNELL RICHARDSON

I've been directly involved in occupational health and safety for 42 years with the lion's share, 40 of those years, being in the private sector and balance in the public sector. This would seem to give me a somewhat unbalanced and very biased look between the two. I have realized that there are certain levels of accountability that tie both the private and public sector together. Building the bridge of accountability can be built from one sector to the other by understanding the commonalities of the compression and tension forces between each sector.

Before building the bridge, let's start with very brief definitions of both sectors:

The Private Sector is owned or controlled by private individuals or companies providing goods and services whose basic objective is to earn a profit.

The Public Sector is controlled by a government providing goods and services via federal, state or local entities, whose basic objective is to serve the people or environment.

Both sectors turn the wheels of our economy in their own unique frame of reference.

Private and Public Sector (common denominators)

The accountability bridge in the private sector, for a health and safety professional should be built using a few key load-bearing truss superstructure items I'll call OSE defined as:

- Operational awareness and value add efficiency
- Subject Matter Expertise
- Empathy for the overall health and wellness of each employee

Operational awareness and discernment of the value-add efficiency of a safe operation. This is a key implement in every safety professional's toolbox. I see it as operational awareness covered by a roof, versus operational awareness outside of a rooftop.

Subject matter expertise (SME) comes with a relentless daily pursuit of learning the craft/profession. Earning our wings as the 'go to' person includes being wise enough to know when to pass the baton to a better qualified SME, and wise enough to know where the rubber hits the road on the proactive side of the equation...not as much on the reactive side. On a balanced scorecard, I burn my calories/time as follows: 75% proactive initiatives and 25% reactive (looking in the rear-view mirror) initiatives.

Empathy on the ground level begins with Safety by Walking Around. This is the safety professional's version of Management by Walking Around. It doesn't matter for which environment it's used...our people are the correlativity resource. Three things happen when the safety professional is on the floor or in the field:

- The safety professional will gain greater understanding and visibility of the operation
- Frontline supervisors and employees will relax and trust in our collaborative objective
- More importantly, we build a rapport with the overall operations teams.

That rapport acts as an additional, non-tangible control along with engineering, administrative or personal protective equipment controls. We put faces to the process/program initiatives. Sounds simple right? Build the bridge!

Summary – the comparative differences that separate accountability for safety in either sector, private or public sectors are net zero.

I hope we all agree that accountability for health and safety has a driver, and that driver happens to be the people that make either sector efficient and successful. A debate for a later date could incorporate the fact that automated tools/equipment in the private sector will somewhat diminish the human element. Albeit, for the purposes of this article, the trifecta of investment in operation awareness and efficiencies, human resource awareness, and nimble market awareness are the safety professionals bridge of accountability success across all sectors.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Cornell Richardson started his safety career in manufacturing operations in a split-shop (union/non-union) tire and rubber manufacturing shop in the late 1970's. His safety career has taken him through the pump and control valve industry, semiconductor manufacturing, specialty chemical manufacturing, retail/contract management, food distribution and heavy equipment. He is currently working in the public sector as a Chief Safety Officer.



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