

SAFETY LEADERSHIP

Understanding a
Leader's Role in Safety



It's as simple as this: safety starts with leadership. While incidents typically happen at the frontline, it is leaders who establish the physical and cultural setting within which the frontline works.

What leaders do (or fail to do) can undermine or promote a safe work environment.

The role of leaders in safety has traditionally been poorly defined. Vague phrases such as “making safety a priority” or “creating a safety culture” are not instructive. There are some obvious behaviors that supervisors, managers and executives need to do to create and sustain excellence in safety. What leaders say about safety, how they prioritize safety both in words and actions, and how quickly they deal with hazardous conditions are all straight-forward examples. But there are also less obvious leader behaviors that impact safety.

Leaders are responsible for creating and maintaining organizational systems and processes. Organizational systems influence behavior just as much, sometimes more, than what leaders say and do directly with the workforce. Safety training programs, incentive systems, staffing levels, reward and recognition programs, promotion and hiring practices, supplier and contractor relationships, and quality programs all have potential impact on safety. Thus, leader behavior sets the context for frontline behavior both directly and indirectly. Yet, the impact of many organizational systems on safety is unknown and unplanned. Leaders often create these

CONTACT

 678.904.6140

 info@aubreydaniels.com

 www.aubreydaniels.com

 aubreydanielsblog.com

 twitter.com/aubreydaniels

 facebook.com/Aubrey.Daniels.International

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systems in order to achieve other important business objectives (e.g., improve quality, lower costs). Therefore, one critical, but not obvious leader behavior is to look at the impact of organizational systems on safety and ensure the systems don't inadvertently encourage at-risk behavior.

The most effective approach for helping leaders do the right things around safety is the same approach used in good Behavior-Based Safety programs: the science of behavior analysis. While the tools and specific strategies differ, only approaches based on science will be effective in the long term. Behavioral science provides the criteria to evaluate safety leadership practices and guides us to safety solutions with maximum impact. Your organization uses the latest science and technology for all other parts of your business. Why would you not use science for the essential job of managing people and their behavior, especially around safety and safety leadership?

At ADI we ensure our clients understand how to improve safety leadership behavior (through the science of behavior analysis), and then help leaders focus on what safety leadership behaviors are most critical.

ADI works with leaders to:

- Manage safety with proactive, behavior-based metrics.
- Replace low-impact leader behaviors with high-impact activities.
- Use science to understand at-risk behavior and management's role in it.
- Engineer positive reinforcement into the workplace to increase safe behaviors at all levels.
- Analyze organizational systems and align them in support of safety.
- Ensure existing safety management programs effectively deliver desired outcomes.
- Develop coaching skills that build engagement and improve performance.

To become exemplary safety leaders who build high-performing safety cultures, leaders must engage in the right behaviors. Good intentions are not enough.

Could your organization benefit from improved safety leadership?

ADI

Founded in 1978 and headquartered in Atlanta, GA, Aubrey Daniels International (ADI) knows that one thing remains constant: People power your business. ADI is dedicated to accelerating the safety and business performance of companies worldwide using positive, practical approaches grounded in the science of behavior and engineered to ensure long term sustainability. Through a suite of safety solutions including surveys, assessments, behavior-based safety and safety leadership training and coaching, ADI provides the tools and methodologies to help organizations create sustainable safety cultures.