

Fresh Ground Leadership

When allowed to grow tepid, neither coffee nor leadership has the same draw.

By [Robert Pater](#) | Nov 01, 2014

Coffee! Just the name sounds appealing, conjuring up tantalizing aromas of beans grinding and java brewing, reassuring feelings of comforting warmth and moments of a needed timeout. Plus, of course, boosting energy and sharpening alertness.

Besides the obvious of awakening and motivating, there are several parallels between coffee and Safety leadership. For one, there are likely just as many approaches to leadership as there are different roasts, methods of preparation, and types of java.

Like coffee, Safety leadership is best when "fresh ground." Because if you let either sit on a burner too long without refreshing or brewing something new, each can become stale or, at very least, its flavor and appeal are reduced. And when allowed to grow tepid, neither coffee nor leadership has the same draw.

At their highest levels, coffee and sterling Safety leadership have hidden, almost-magical effects. The *latter* elevates engagement, productivity, commitment, communications, as well as injury prevention; the *latte* (well, coffee in general) demonstrably protects personal health in surprising ways.

Did you realize that coffee actually generates extensive positive outcomes? Recent research indicates that it's so much more than merely a caffeinated boost. For example, coffee provides the biggest source of antioxidants for U.S. residents, according to scientists at the University of Scranton. And a joint research team from Harvard Medical School and the University of Madrid found that those who drank more coffee were "actually less likely to die within the decades of the study because of a lower risk of cardiovascular disease."

Even further, coffee has been found to protect against gout, tooth decay, gallstones,

type 2 diabetes, neurological damage, Parkinson's disease, inflammation, the most lethal form of prostate cancer--as well as lowering the risk of liver cancer by about 40 percent (according to the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*)--and perhaps to protect against deteriorating eyesight and even blindness (in the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*.) These above are the studied effects of coffee, caffeinated or not. Caffeine in coffee further improves memory and brain information processing speed.

What's going on here? Many of the exact ways coffee impacts the body are not yet clear--there's a lot going on. Perhaps this is because there are many ingredients in coffee that haven't yet been fully studied. According to The Royal Society of Chemistry, "Coffee contains a tremendous number of chemicals, with over 1000 aroma compounds."

But more isn't necessarily better. First off, drinking too much coffee can adversely affect sleep health and raise anxiety. Too much caffeine use 1) has been associated with increased depression and 2) may reduce a woman's likelihood of becoming pregnant (according to researchers from the University of Nevada School of Medicine).

Similarly, for Safety leadership, more isn't always better. Authors of several coffee benefit studies emphasize moderation, stating that only one or two cups a day appear to be beneficial. Similarly, time and again, I've seen diminishing organizational returns from "too much Safety leadership" (i.e., creating and disseminating an overload of Safety rules, policies and procedures). Or from upping the enforcement/punishment approach to those "caught" not following the rules, trying to "force" engagement, or broadcasting a hyped external motivation approach to Safety. So when it comes to coffee and Safety leadership, moderation rules. For example, rather than attempting to drink too much from the leadership cup yourself, try backing off some and making space for others to take on Safety leadership responsibilities; extensive experience has shown us that encouraging peer-to-peer leadership may be the most effective approach an "official" Safety leader can make.

Second, ever wonder why it is that a company is often drastically disappointed after attempting to mimic another's successful intervention? Like coffee, there are many substances involved in any sip of Safety, of which I've written about throughout the years. But just because these may be difficult to analyze (like the compounds in coffee) doesn't mean they aren't brew-able by others. Safety leaders should look below the surface to sniff out hidden contributors to injuries; for example, seeing whether workers harbor deep suspicions about the policies that are passed down, as well as static quo/inertia/resistance to change.

Third, partake at the right time. Just as coffee consumed late in the afternoon is more likely to disrupt sleep patterns, Safety interventions applied at the "wrong" time can backfire. For example, watch out for a common-but-unhelpful default toward forcing new programs on "those that need it most." Instead, often the best place to first try out something is with a more "typical" group or business unit, rather than one with massive problems. And even brief but well-percolated Safety timeouts can provide perspective, raise team spirit, and reduce stress.

Fourth, maximize change by enlisting the senses. Coffee's appeal goes beyond taste to sounds, smell, and feel of cup in the hand. The same is true when attempting to upsurge Safety skills, engagement, motivation, and involvement. Tasting, smelling, and feeling generates believing. So, for example, make sure that those you want to draw to new PPE actually get a chance to feel it and try it on themselves.

And, above all, drink your coffee and impart Safety leadership fresh, rather than boiled over or stale. The almost magical benefits of java and leadership will waft your way with the right approach.

About the Author

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