
3 E's For Steering Superior Safety

Enlist these three critical, interlocking "E's" in your own way and you'll also achieve remarkable strides in Safety performance, communications, leadership, and culture.

By [Robert Pater](#) | Nov 01, 2016

Are you looking for ways to move the needle on your Safety performance? Not content to be pinned to a plateau? Or experiencing up/down sine waves of buy-in? Been trying different things but getting the same results—or, worse, returns from what once worked have flatlined?

I've seen it's easy to become overwhelmed with all kinds of "latest and greatest" promises, such as thinking back belts would eliminate all strains and sprains or that monitoring workers would ensure each of them complies with procedures all the time. This kind of panacea wishful thinking infects so many leaders, and not just in Safety. Have you ever been encumbered with a flash-in-the-pan, fix-the-organization quick scheme that a senior manager brought in? I've found that complex issues rarely evaporate with one-shot "solutions." Ask yourself, did the latest leadership fad solve our company's problems? If not, then why do so many organizations look for the silver bullet to solve their Safety issues?

The good news is you don't have to resort to impossible-to-sustain solutions or those with an unlikely number of have-to-dos. By focusing on three interlocking objectives, you can simultaneously and sizably reduce a broad spectrum of nagging injuries while raising buy-in, mindfulness, and overall performance.

The 3 Essential E's of Safety performance and culture are:

1. **Expertise.** Don't make the magical-thinking mistake that there's an effortless, time-free cure that will immediately fix all, whether this goes by rah-rah motivation, appeals for exerting "will," shock exposures, touchy-feely maneuvers, or merely repeating the same-old exhortations. ("Pay attention!" "Think before you act," "Be

safe," etc.)

Actual change is ultimately founded on improving skills. Substantial and lasting change isn't just based on "trying harder." I know from experience (martial arts, keynoting, writing, basketball, paddle sports, even parenting, etc.) that moving up relies on being receptive to new skills, adapting them for myself, practicing in several scenarios, making mindful adjustments, and then moving toward the next higher level of skill development. Though many assume their company already contains the skills to elevate Safety to highest levels, we've found this frequently isn't the case. Whether wanting to highly effectively lead, communicate, artfully wield tools, cross slippery or object-strewn surfaces with solid balance, assemble with precise coordination, move different objects easily without physical tension rebounding into the body, swing a golf club so the ball goes where you want it to land—every endeavor requires acquiring, then effectively applying the right skills.

In some three decades of working in the Safety field, I've seen there are better ways to lead; elevate culture; prevent slips/trips/falls, soft-tissue injuries, and hand injuries; and more. Expertise in these areas can be relatively quickly learned to make sooner-rather-than-later differences.

Keys: Don't assume you already know all the best ways. Don't settle for more of the same. Be vigilantly on the lookout for new-to-you, better skills for accomplishing existing tasks. Ask around with an open mind. And even where skills exist, they still have to be expertly shared, applied, and reinforced with others to move to a higher performance level. Elevating skills requires a new, higher level of expertise, not just increasing the volume or intensity of effort using old knowledge.

2. Energizing. Energy is the spark of change. No matter how desirably a potential improvement calls to us, something has to help us get over the hump of the used-to ways we've been doing. Safety improvements often require *ongoing* sparking (just as it can require more than one match to ignite a fire). Energy and excitement are critical to promoting buy-in, yet so much of Safety defaults to numbingly repeating have-tos, memorizing rules and procedures, following long checklists that can seem counter-intuitive. While these serve as a necessary base for operations—and for compliance with regulating agencies—add in the spice of energy to your Safety cooking.

Keys: There are several tangible ways to energize your workforce, from enlisting curiosity to challenging teams to beat their own or others' performance to demonstrating personal benefits to them of using Safety techniques (e.g., improved performance in their favorites sports and activities, help children and older relatives, more peace of mind, make things easier, etc.). And a lot of energizing leaps from

reducing activities that suck the air out of the Safety room: less needless memorization, moving from passive to highly interactive Safety meetings, letting go of having to always do things in the "old ways" and uninteresting or go-through-the-motions messages/training/investigations.

Further, leaders have to communicate with enthusiasm, rather than sending cues that Safety is boring or they're only interested in keeping regulating agencies off their backs. Keep in mind that nothing is more energizing than positive results. Be sure that planning leads to actual action and that good outcomes, even small, are reported back to everyone to help re-energize them. And much more.

3. Engaging. While currently popular, I've found "engagement" actually goes well beyond just "participating." Engaging means people respond, "I'm in!" What's not "engaging"? Forced, joyless participation where workers are "volunteered" to talk or sit on a committee or fill out forms rather than face ridicule or other sanctions.

Keys: Give them a choice. Draw their interest by inviting rather than trying to force them to respond. I've found that people aren't convinced, they're magnetized—so give them opportunities to try things by engaging their bodies as well as their minds. Let them put on newly proposed PPE, physically test out new tools for themselves, practice walking on typically slippery surfaces with newly learned techniques. Focus off-work, as well: Ask if they'd be willing to briefly speak about their favorite off-work hobbies/activities and how Safety plays a part. Listen more, tell less: Elicit their concerns and suggestions. And there's much more.

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About the Author

Robert Pater is Managing Director of Strategic Safety Associates and MoveSMART®. To contact him, email rpater@movesmart.com.

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