CAPSafety Beacon

The Safety Beacon is for informational purposes. Unit Safety Officers are encouraged to use the articles in the Beacon as topics for their monthly safety briefings and discussions. Members may go to [eservices Learning Management System](#), click on "Go to AXIS," search for this month's Safety Beacon, take the quiz, and receive safety education credit.

Proactive Culture and Safety

No matter an organization's strategy, it's culture and people make that strategy work. For example, CAP has a robust reporting culture that is resulting in an increase in the quantity and quality of our safety data. In turn, once that data is turned into reports, it can be used to make decisions about safety priorities across the organization. The question now is, what are the ways of thinking and acting that will make our approach to safety risk management even more effective? One way is to shift from being more reactive to more proactive in responding to safety concerns.

Culture Eats Strategy for Breakfast

Peter Drucker -- business consultant, educator, and author -- is often quoted as having said, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast." Drucker means that culture is a force that can either constrain or sustain strategy, not that one is better than the other. Said another way, people are the makers or breakers of an organization's strategy and goals. For CAP's Safety Management System, it means every member can be a force that helps us achieve our aim to be more proactive in safety risk management.

> Bottom line: Our members are the ultimate makers or breakers for CAP becoming proactive in safety risk management (SRM). CAP needs every member to be *relentlessly* responsible and consistent in preparing for safe outcomes in every event and activity.

Reactive Culture

Waiting for a negative safety outcome to occur before taking steps to prevent it is indicative of a reactive culture. Reactive organizations resist addressing risk during planning and preparation actions, and they choose to wait until there's a crisis before acting. These reactive cultures also ignore key precursors that can lead to catastrophic outcomes because of firmly held beliefs that the worst outcome won't likely happen to them.

Reactive organizations end up facing a serious, usually undesirable, event that can have major impacts on morale, reliability, and credibility. They get caught off-guard when something tragic happens and react defensively, choosing to deny versus accepting responsibility for proactive prevention ("There's nothing we could have done to prevent this!"). As a result, these organizations can lose public confidence and may never rebuild it. Reactive cultures do more to defend their image than to protect people.

To uphold the public trust and maintain the confidence of our members, partners, and donors, members must do everything they can to prevent harm to our people and damage of our resources. When we embrace and practice proactive safety risk management, we reflect our integrity and respect values in ways that signal our care for people and commitment to reliability.

Proactive Culture

Good planning and preparation are keys to acting proactively. Sun Tzu, in *The Art of War*, says, "Plan for what is difficult while it is easy, do what is great while it is small." Following Sun Tzu's logic, if we prepare in advance for what could happen, our task is much easier because once you are "in the moment," you are simply reacting; there's no time to prepare -- you are now along for the ride, so to speak.

A proactive culture means that members take positive action without the need for direction or intervention. However, positive action, in this sense, isn't possible without awareness of the hazards involved and what actions to take to proactively address them. In other words, we don't know what we don't know. How can we prepare for things that may happen if we have no experience with them?

As an opposite to reactive culture, proactive organizations embrace and practice planning and preparation, identifying and mitigating hazards even if they've not occurred in the past, and seeking out behavioral key precursors that can lead to negative safety outcomes. In addition, they communicate their commitment to these ideals, help others to become aware of hazards they may not be aware of, celebrate success, and learn from failure.

Leadership Is Key

Formal leaders have the bulk of responsibility when it comes to guiding members toward the attributes of an effective and mature safety culture. Craig Radford's LinkedIn article, "Proactive Employees Are Great; A Proactive Culture Is Better," is a good read if you want to learn more about promoting a proactive culture. One way to promote that culture is to create and maintain a positive and encouraging environment, as opposed

to an environment where people's actions are directed or where leaders react negatively to errors.

Radford states that "people are more productive and creative when they *enjoy* their work." People join CAP, in part, because they have something to contribute and want to serve or give back in some way; they also want to experience fulfillment and satisfaction. When they enjoy the work and feel supported in trying to make a difference, they are more likely to engage in ways that help us maintain trust, credibility, and reliability.

What can CAP leaders do to create a positive and encouraging environment? Radford says that communication is key. Let members know their input is valued. When they bring safety issues up (and nonsafety issues, for that matter), tell them how important raising those issues is, involve them in deciding whether the issue needs to be prioritized, and invite them to be part of the solution. When members feel supported in this way, they are likely to look for more opportunities to solve safety problems before they create a negative safety outcome.

Reflection Questions

What would members say is the nature of the culture in your unit -- more reactive or more proactive? What specific examples can they share that support their assessment?

How could you involve members in coming up with possible ways to shift a culture that's described as more reactive?

What would progress in making the shift look like? How would leaders be behaving toward members? How would members be responding to the "asks" leadership is making of them to help shift the culture?