

Offering Grace Through Qualitative Data

The safety and health path has evolved over the years in ways that have often challenged our thinking and our ways of making safer and healthier environments for everyone. We are attempting to push the blame and shame culture aside to one of embracing learning and improving our safety and health outcomes through clear data and conversations that respect one another. When you read the updated safety regulations within Civil Air Patrol, you see language that has shifted and has hopefully taken a tone that invokes trust. There are no doubt pinnacle events within our organization from within your region, your wing, your group, or even your squadron may invoke negative thoughts and feelings on how a negative outcome event was handled in the past. It may be leaving a bad taste of what safety should be and causing you to draw away from being a part of our safety journey based around learning. Trust takes time to earn and can be lost in an instant and may never be earned back again in some situations.

This is where grace comes in and can be applied in how we as an organization heal and forgive one another and hopefully give each the benefit of the doubt in moving forward. Causing a negative safety event on purpose is a rare occurrence within any organization, particularly one where it is volunteer based. We each show up wanting to do our best and make a positive difference, it is a core value of being a volunteer. We are a learning organization filled with opportunities that benefit our communities, states, nation, and us as individuals that are a part of an amazing total force mission. Each time a negative outcome occurs we have an opportunity to shine and learn from the undesirable event and hopefully prevent a similar occurrence from occurring again within our organization and those we impact.

When a negative outcome occurs, we most often enter these events into our new Safety Information System, CAPSIS. This system helps track events at the wing, region, and national levels. This quantitative data is then used to track trends to see if we need to make course corrections to prevent further incidents from happening. Real time data is important and a leading indicator for a safety system within an organization. In our new system, we are tracking more comprehensive data than our previous system to have the best data possible in preventing negative outcome incidents in the future. We check boxes, answer questions, provide witness statements, and paint a general picture of what happened. We then click submit and we wait...

While we wait, we wonder, and we ask ourselves questions based on our involvement in the incident. We come up with concrete answers in our minds and many times make some assumptions. This is another area where grace can be utilized. These reports are tracked up and down the chain of command, each person is analyzing the data and painting a picture in their own mind of the events that unfolded. Often, the only data available is what was put into that CAPSIS report for painting the picture to those reviewing the incident. By offering each other grace, we know that each of us has the best intentions of seeing a positive outcome via learning as a resolution to a negative outcome.

To do this, we need to apply the learning at all levels of the organization to the negative outcome incident. This is where qualitative data comes in. This is the data that pushes beyond the numbers and check boxes. This is the data that is written and/or discussed and helps the reviewer(s) fully understand what occurs through well thought out witness statements and follow-up inquiries. It is this data that shows the human element side of our stories and how we relay them in preventing future incidents from occurring by sharing the lessons we learned

from the negative outcome event. We can choose to bury the incident and not share it. We may bury it due to embarrassment, pride, shame, disgrace, or any other negative human attribute that pushes us away from the excellence and integrity we each hold as a core value.

But when we choose to say we will learn and share this learning experience, we transform our organization to one that admits mistakes through humility and in return we receive and offer grace to one another. Trust is not broken and in fact flourishes for each of us. This is where qualitative data impacts the organization for the better and prevents others from being injured or killed if they find themselves in a similar situation. We apply the learning early and often and share it with each of us as volunteers who are seeking to live by implementing our core values of Integrity, Volunteer Service, Excellence, and Respect.

How does this apply to an incident though? The first is in how we communicate and approach those who have suffered a negative outcome event. We set the tone from our first interaction surrounding those who were a part of this negative event. When you respond, which answer would you prefer to hear? What happened or how is everyone doing? That brief question shows compassion and starts the right tone for grace. More questions that show care and compassion will help build trust as the review process starts. The first 24 hours after an accident can push people into the fight or flight mode if we do not show care, compassion, and support. Support can come in many forms based on what unfolded. If it is a serious injury or death, the people affected by the incident will need support we may not be accustomed to providing, it may mean that we need to connect with others who are outside of our normal interactions. It can be a safety mentor that is just a phone call or email away, it will most certainly involve others up your chain of command who are there to support you through this difficult time of responding to an incident that is serious in nature.

During the first phases of a response, witness statements and other interviews will take place. This is the qualitative data that paints a picture via a story being put together. This data is the most difficult to properly annotate and, in some cases, may not even be put into CAPSIS as it feels like it may not fit. But this data is priceless for creating a learning document that can help others in our organization learn from the incident that occurred. This data can create more work for us who are responding to the incident as we become the storytellers of the incident.

Being a storyteller of the incident is a sacred duty, people expect the truth to be told. The tricky part is that not everyone may have seen the story the same way and you as the storyteller must determine how to best fit the story puzzle together. This is where grace is really needed by everyone involved. The first step to this is overcommunicating verse under communication. People have expectations in their minds, and we will rarely fully meet those expectations, particularly when we under communicate what is occurring with the review process. Sending out an update on a consistent basis is one way to build grace into your qualitative process, even if there may not be much to report. The longer no response or update is taking, the more people begin to fill in the blanks on their own and it is generally not in a favorable way towards others. Under communicating is the fastest way to losing trust and losing grace through an accident review.

As we continue to evolve our safety culture for one that trades in blame and shame to one of learning, we need to take the time to go the extra mile. It will mean taking time to share parts of the accident story that may not be flattering or may feel like we are bringing shame upon our organization by highlighting a deficiency in our eyes. This can be done through creating a new safety product that shares the story with the rest of our organization, our national safety

office is a resource we can use to share the story with others. They have the networking capabilities to support us in telling a story that shows we are learning from incidents that occur and they can share it with those who need to hear the story we have been privileged to share.