

# Building a Safer Climate Through Talent Management

## How Personality Drives Safety Behavior

### HOGAN ASSESSMENTS

It's surprisingly easy for busy organizations to overlook the importance of fundamentals, even when it comes to something as critical to reputation and profitability as safety. And safety starts with talent management.

While safety training certainly helps, what organizations need most are employees who think and act safely in the first place. If an organization doesn't have proper insight into how individuals contribute to the safety climate, even the most extensive program will deliver limited success.

#### He Zigged When He Should Have Zagged

When managers traditionally describe their best employees, they often don't talk about skill sets or ability to handle equipment. Instead, they use broad terms like *hardworking*, *safe*, *reliable*, and *dependable* – adjectives that describe behavior.

Does a worker panic under pressure? Does he defy authority and ignore important safety precautions? Does he lose his temper? Does he take unnecessary risks? Does he become easily distracted and bored?

Generally 60% to 80% of workplace accidents are attributed to operator error. Not surprisingly, the investigations into workplace accidents overwhelmingly cite when operators are confronted by unexpected situations and failures, they make poor behavioral decisions. Unfortunately, it's only possible after the fact to determine that "he zigged when he should have zagged."

#### Creating a Climate of Safety

Traditional approaches to safety policy and training focus on age-old methods involving safety equipment and standard protocol to deal with workplace hazards – videos that highlight safety policies and procedures, periodic training for equipment operation, updates and enhancements to machinery, daily safety checklists, days-without-accident awareness, and other high-level risk management initiatives. The problem lies in that these approaches often focus on everything *but* the very people who are expected to benefit.

In fact, creating a truly effective safety climate requires organizations to focus on people, and on the individual personality characteristics that drive behavior.

Over more than a century of studying the problem of how to reduce accidents in the workplace, research points to three critical components that work together to improve safety – a culture of worker engagement, organizational leadership, and worker personality.

#### Engaging Every Level of the Organization

The best way to create safety awareness and acceptance on an organizational, management and employee level is to start with the concept of engagement. It's common sense that managers and employees who are made to feel vital in company operations work harder to stay that way.

Safety works from the top down. Improvements in the safety climate rely on engaged management to regularly

communicate expectations and regulations regarding safety issues. Managers need to recognize risk-prone behaviors and possess the tools to coach around them, promoting strategic self-awareness among the employees. Engaged workers who understand the personality characteristics that cause risky behaviors have a much greater ability to control their actions. Armed with this knowledge, it's possible for organizations to do what was previously so difficult: actually predict and influence safety behavior.

#### What Does Safety Talent Management Look Like?

The idea of building a safer, more engaged corporate culture is a compelling one, and requires an ongoing commitment from organizational leadership to structure talent management to include personality assessment.

**Begin with the right employees** – Make a safety culture testing procedure part of the hiring process. Start with people with a propensity for safety.

**Train managers** – Managers must recognize risk-prone employees and be equipped with the right tools to coach those employees. A highly reliable personality assessment tool can quantify those beliefs and help managers assess those most likely to cause an accident.

**Educate employees** – Help employees understand how their personality affects workplace safety. Put real-world situations in front of them that relate directly to their safety.

#### Understanding Personality and Workplace Safety

Headlines attest daily to the fact that safety-related accidents continue in spite of traditional approaches to training and regulation, underscoring the value of individual personality as a crucial part of workplace safety programs and initiatives.

Time and time again, recurring safety-related issues and incidents are linked directly to decisions that require exercising leadership under stress, with sound judgment and control. It's become increasingly clear that the most effective safety initiatives combine traditional training programs with the assessment of individual personalities.

#### Rethinking Employee Safety Training

The longstanding belief that proper safety training leads to safer employees is an accurate one. But the more we understand about personality and behavior, the more it becomes apparent that the right combination of traditional safety training and safety-based personality assessments can have a significant impact on an organization's overall safety and bottom line. ■

#### About Hogan

Hogan Assessment Systems provides personality assessments to help companies select employees, develop leaders, and identify talent. Hogan specializes in identifying high potential candidates, providing leadership development tools to help emerging leaders realize their full potential, and determining relationships between individual personality characteristics and safety performance. For more information visit [www.hoganassessments.com](http://www.hoganassessments.com).