

THE RESULTS GROUP

21 Qualities of an Effective Safety Leader

(Implement to Become a True Professional)

A Special Report

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By Billy Arcement, MEd—*The Leadership Strategist*

All great safety programs are headed by great leaders. Mastering leadership skills is equally as important as mastering safety skills. They must work hand and glove for you to develop an outstanding safety initiative within your organization. Look through these twenty-one ideas to see how many you are using. This is a good list to begin to examine your performance. Over time, continue to add to the list. It's a commitment with a huge benefit for you personally and for the overall safety of those under your responsibility.

(1) Be a more visible leader of safety initiatives. It's important that employees see you as the "action" person who does not let safety issues go unanswered. Your response to issues helps build trust in the process and the overall efforts put forth by the safety department. Not only must you be visible but when you find anything that is out of compliance, you must correct it. Being visible while not enforcing safety behavior and/or conditions is an instant loss of credibility.

(2) React quickly to safety issues / concerns that are raised. You don't want to be considered a "black hole" when it comes to safety. Employees that raise concerns want answers. Even if nothing can be done, it is critically important that you respond in a timely manner and explain what you can do to protect employees or correct a safety deficiency. Set deadlines for yourself to get back to individuals who provide you with a request for help. The more rapid the response, the greater credibility you will establish.

(3) Become a "take charge" leader. Don't wait around for others to do what you should be doing. Be aggressive in addressing issues. Be on the forefront of issues. Let people view you as someone who can lead and does lead. Being indecisive, non-responsive and/or a procrastinator, "discharges" your effectiveness and followship. People want to sense they have a strong leader that knows what he or she is doing. Don't shy away from your responsibilities. Meet them head on and get them done.

(4) Complete assignments in a timely fashion. Leave no open-ended issues. Strong leaders finish what they start and they do things in as efficient and effective a manner that they are able. Incomplete assignments are unacceptable behavior. Break the task into small parts with deadlines for each one within the time frame allotted for completion of the task. A deadline keeps you on track and assures completion. If you need help, seek it. Just don't let things fall by the wayside. That does not endear you to your management, your peers or your employees.

(5) Anticipate issues. Be proactive. Always look for a better way. Keep your eyes on the big picture. When you view safety initiatives, always look for ways to improve the process. Again, be aggressive in anticipating events before they surface. Keeping this prospective will minimize the likelihood of a catastrophic event occurring without warning. It's about prevention, taking the initiative, and making improvement the only way to approach your responsibilities.

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(6) Don't fall behind. Stay on task. Offer no excuses. Get things done quickly and right.

Purchase some type of time management system such as the Franklin-Covy or Daytimer systems. If you prefer use a computer, iPhone or other hand-held device to plan your tasks. The bottom line is that you need one calendar--one schedule of events that you can refer to and see everything you've scheduled for the day. Decide on the system that works best for you and eliminate all others. Multiple calendars are out! Start each day by prioritizing items in their order of importance and get started. By making a list from which to work, you always know the tasks that lie ahead. This allows better scheduling and proficiency. It's also nice to cross an item off your list to add to your sense of accomplishment.

(7) Hold everyone accountable to do their share of the safety process. A true leader does their tasks but also requires those who undertake assignments for them to also complete their work. Accountability is a key characteristic all great leaders incorporate into their activities and they expect the same level of accountability from those they lead. So raise the tolerance level regarding your performance and the performance of those under your charge. The result of this mindset serves as a catalyst for moving people to new heights of performance.

(8) Be a team player. Work well with everyone regardless of how you feel personally about them. First and foremost, you must always be a professional. And true professionals know they must work with everyone within the employment of the organization. Build the reputation of being a cooperative and cordial player. It's important to note that you don't have to like everyone but you have a professional obligation to work well with them. In today's work environment, teamwork and individual responsibility are key components successful businesses have incorporated into their culture. Being a pro means professional behavior, regardless of the circumstances. If you cannot do this, you don't deserve to lead.....period!

(9) Keep everyone informed of your activities. It's better for your manager to tell you to send updates on a project less frequently than to have them not know what is happening. So, as you work through projects, keep everyone that needs to know informed regarding progress. This is not as critical for short-term projects but it is important for projects that extend over several weeks. Use short emails, memos, phone calls—the best communication media for the situation. Document all contacts made on your daily calendar so you can chronicle your activities should anyone question your efforts or communications. It's also smart to keep a copy of all materials forwarded to anyone involved with the project. This can be a career saver in a “touchy” situation. Never forget the person with the best notes will generally win the disagreement.

(10) If given an assignment, do it. Don't be told twice. When discussing an assignment from your manager, don't leave until you are very clear on the outcome desired and when it is expected to be done. But, when the discussion is done and you are clear regarding your tasks, do them. Confidence and trust in your leadership abilities diminishes greatly if you have to be repeatedly told to start or complete a task. An agile mindset works well. Carrying out your projects after the initial discussion increases your credibility and greatly enhances the trust level your management team will have in you. And, losing trust can be deadly to your career.

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(11) Raise your enthusiasm for all you do. Enthusiasm can be initiated for anything. For example, when you conduct safety training, do it in a professional manner with great enthusiasm and passion. You will want to make your safety training interesting, participatory and energizing for attendees. You want that enthusiasm to spread. Thinking you don't like to do a task, will make the task a drudgery. Being enthusiastic about undertaking a task will make the activity a pleasure to perform. It's all in the mind. To be perceived as enthusiastic, you must be enthusiastic. Behaving this way makes you a more pleasant person to be around. No one likes to be around boring and unenthusiastic people. So don't be one!

(12) Stay busy. Minimize socialization. When you come to work, be prepared to work. Earn your pay by your productivity. Yes, it's important to take an occasional break. But, you are not paid to socialize. You are paid to produce results. Visiting but be constantly aware when visiting becomes a time wasting activity. Busy people get more done. And, people who get more done gain a higher level of respect in an organization. People with a higher level of respect usually have a greater opportunity to rise on the ladder of responsibility. Staying busy producing results works!

(13) Keep current on safety regulations. As a professional, you must continually build your learning curve. Network with fellow professionals, read magazines and books on safety and/or attend safety conferences. Use the internet to research a topic or issue. Keep learning and you will grow. If you are not learning, you are regressing because there is always something new on the horizon. Most important is to never get caught violating of a regulation simply because you were not proactive enough to keep up. Regulatory inspectors are not looking for excuses. They want implementation of items, not a non-compliant safety program.

(14) Be punctual. If you schedule a meeting or are requested to participate in a meeting, be there on time. Several years ago, while working in the private sector, we implemented a policy of closing the door when our meeting started. Anyone arriving late had to lead the group in a cheer. Once the company president was late and we made him be our cheerleader. He never showed up late again. Yes, it's risky behavior but it works when everyone is forewarned and you follow through on your promise. Likewise, if you have an appointment, show up on time. If you have an unavoidable delay, contact the person and let them know your status and when you anticipate arriving. This behavior simply comes down to being respectful and courteous to others.

(15) Act like you want the job. To be considered for a leadership position, you must display an ability to do the job. Acting indifferent or in an inefficient manner does not endear one to becoming a leader. If you want to be the safety leader, let people know by your actions that you can handle the job. Great leaders don't accept a "half-way" performance from themselves or from those they lead. You are in charge so act that way!

(16) Manage by walking around. Be visible in the field. To help you get out of the office, schedule facility tours on a regular but random schedule. You don't want your "walking around" to be predictable. This random schedule tends to keep people on their best safety behavior because they don't know when you are likely to show up. When you are visiting an area, talk to people about safe behavior. If you see anything unsafe, have it corrected. Being

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visible ties the job to you. An important component of this process is to not be perceived as an enforcer or policeman for good safety. Your job is to change behavior. Being visible, if you are seen as someone that will not tolerate unsafe behavior or practices, is normally good enough to show people you are serious. Simply put, you cannot manage safety from your office.

(17) You are always on display. Never forget that everyone is looking to you for leadership of the safety initiatives. Your behavior, demeanor, and attitude are in a constant evaluation mode. Let everyone see what they need to see in order to build confidence in your leadership ability and in the overall safety initiative undertaken by your department. One letdown can cause you grief for a long time. Great safety leaders understand this and don't let their guard down.

(18) Provide solutions, not problems: Great leaders do not give their management problems to solve. They take the initiative and provide solutions. This is a proactive position. Your job is not to unload "monkeys" on the back of those who manage your job activities. Take on problems and create workable solutions if you want to truly make an impression on those who are watching your performance. And never forget that the people you lead have a brain and can offer innovative solutions. It doesn't always have to be about "you." "Us" works a lot better.

(19) Be easy to work with: Become a "servant leader." Those leaders who strive to provide top quality service to those they lead and to those they work under will separate themselves from the average crowd. Don't make life difficult for those who need to work with you in any capacity. Be cordial, polite, and generous with your knowledge. Share what you know and become helpful as best you can. Helping others with a service mentality, in the long run, will result in greater rewards for you and recognition of your leadership abilities. Safety managers cannot survive as prima-donnas.

(20) Leadership references: Continue to grow your knowledge of safety leadership. Find good books that speak to leadership issues. Two of my favorite authors on leadership are John Maxwell and John Wooden. Both offer practical leadership ideas that are applicable in virtually every leadership endeavor one might undertake. Read the books with a highlighter and pen. When you read a passage that you find significant, highlight it. Write notes on pages where personal thoughts or ideas are generated as you read. Then the book becomes a living document to which you can refer over and over again. Build a library of references. Serious students of leadership and management never stop looking for the next great idea that might help build their career or add to their success components.

(21) View your work as a career building opportunity, not a job. Too many people only want to collect a good paycheck without providing the necessary effort to earn that pay. Viewing your work as a career and not a job gives one an entirely different perspective. Careers offer a future and greater security than a job. A career mentality enables you to see the bigger picture and ultimately make more significant contributions. People with jobs think about the weekend, not their future.

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Closing Commentary

Well, how do you rate against the list? I'll spot you five points and let you rate yourself on 20 @ five points each for a perfect score of 100. Be honest or, more importantly, let others rate your performance. People that work for you are a great place to start. If you are doing all these things, your people will be proud to help you. If you are not doing so great, this might be a wake-up call if your boss hasn't fired you yet!

Make it a habit to periodically review these leadership qualities with the intent of continuously improving your performance. That's what true leaders do. Are you ready to join this elite group?

Billy Arcement, MEd—*The Leadership Strategist*, is a professional speaker, consultant, executive coach, and author of four books and over 300 published articles. He *provides common sense leadership solutions in uncommon times*. See www.SearchingForSuccess.com for details about his services and contact information. © 2011.