After the Cherry Picking—What Next?

You’ve just celebrated one year without a lost time injury. Everyone is patting you on the back for a job well done. You’ve successfully changed much of the culture from negative to positive. You are enjoying your day in the sun, a sign that you got everyone, employees to top management, to buy into and make the safety program work.

As you are about to bask in the glory and shift into cruise control, your plant manager approached. He says, “Good job for the last two years. I’m really pleased with your hard work. But how do you top what you just did? Think about where you want to be next year, okay? By the way, let’s sit down next Monday and talk about it.”

You reply, “Sir, I’ve given that a lot of thought and I’d love to sit down and talk to you about it.” In a few seconds—Aughgh! Someone help me!—you just went from happy to scared.

What’s a safety manager to do? Well, if you were a planner, you would have presented your pre-approved plan at the celebration. It’s too late for that now. You must examine where you are and where you want to go. You’ve done all the easy things—you’ve written a comprehensive safety program, completed the first comprehensive audit, and changed the culture. Everything on the surface looks squared away. Now the job gets harder. Your boss expects you to be a visionary and to formulate a plan for the next quantum leap. But what is a visionary?

When you examine where you are and where you want to go, you must make some well-thought-out decisions and present a cogent plan that looks like, well, you have your stuff together. Do this wrong and
you might be considered a flash in the pan, pigeon-holed in this job with no hopes for ever moving up, or worse yet, put on the barely-disguised path towards the front gate. Yikes! After the recent success, how could they do that!? But it happens all the time, so be careful and think about what you want to do. At a minimum, it could cost you your future advancement, and at the most, it could cost you your job.

**What is a visionary?**

One of Webster’s definitions of a visionary is, “disposed to reverie or imagining, illusory; dreamy.” My definition of a visionary is someone who understands the past and present and has an idea of what the future will hold. Webster’s definition contains two key words: imagining and dreamy. *Imagining* implies imagination, innovation, and creativity. It is more than merely hanging on from year to year, doing the same old things. *Dreamy* implies a dream. Martin Luther King did not galvanize the crowds with, “I have an objective”. He did it with the phrase, “I have a dream.”

I can’t tell you how many times I have run into safety professionals and asked them what their five-year plan is. The reply is generally, “Gee, I haven’t given that much thought. I’m just trying to get through this year.” However, when I ask, “What would you do if you won the lottery?” the reply is, “I’m going to buy a new house, a new car, a vacation home, retire and write books,” and so on. If those safety professionals would only apply the same energy to their professional aspirations as they do to their personal dreams, who knows what they could achieve?

**Choices to Make**

Let’s take a look at some of the options you could choose from to make your next quantum leap. The items you choose from this shopping list depends on your company. You could: