Mike Taubitz

PS: Why was it important to add a chapter on sustainability to the Safety Professionals Handbook?

Mike: Sustainability is a major strategic initiative being endorsed by many boards of directors. It is critical that safety be part of this effort now and in the future, lest it be relegated to the backburner.

PS: What key takeaways can readers expect from this chapter?

Mike: Readers will better understand the origin of sustainable growth’s triple bottom line—people, profit and planet—and the subtle distinction from corporate social responsibility. They will also better understand how the integration of safety and environment with continuous improvement thinking can help in the journey to sustainability.

PS: What small steps can companies take to work toward achieving that triple bottom line?

Mike: Companies can use the concepts of W. Edwards Deming and continuous improvement thinking to integrate safety into a business. Lean tools and thinking were created to help implement Deming’s teachings, and they are useful on a daily basis. Deming taught continuous improvement using the recognized plan-do-check-act (PDCA) model. He was a system thinker who outlined 14 points of managing in his 1982 book, Out of the Crisis. The problem then was how to implement his philosophical points.

This brought forth the creation of simple systems like 5S (workplace organization) and five-why problem solving (i.e., asking “why?” five times to get at root-cause system issues). In a nutshell, Deming made it clear that it is management’s responsibility to have a system that engages workers in the daily pursuit of continuous improvement. Attempts to use lean tools without the basic respect for people demanded by Deming will typically result in less than desired results.

PS: Since the book was published, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) formed a working group on OHS. What effect do you expect this development to have?

Mike: It is my hope that safety becomes much more prominent in stature. Right now, it accounts for about 2% of the GRI guidelines.

PS: Explain the idea that there is sound business logic in sustainability.

Mike: Many people confuse being green with being sustainable. However, the triple bottom requires that profit also be made along with taking care of the people side of things. Companies that strive to eliminate waste while maintaining respect for employees can improve profits, reduce injuries and reduce environmental impacts.

PS: How can companies add sustainability efforts and initiatives to their budgets?

Mike: I work with several clients who are using lean tools and thinking to drive both safety and long-term sustainable growth. Lean thinking helps people with teamwork, standardizing work to eliminate waste, and make things run faster, better and cheaper.

PS: How can managers gain employee buy-in when dealing with continuous improvement and safety?

Mike: Follow Deming. It is all about respect for people and viewing things from the perspective of the worker. It is simple but not easy because this type of thinking forces us to first unlearn much of what we have been taught. One example that many may remember is “if you can’t do it right the first time, don’t do it at all.” Folks then spend precious time and resources trying for perfection. Continuous improvement thinking would have a team of people do a simple five-why analysis. Once the real issue is identified, teams can standardize work to eliminate waste. If the standard is not perfect, which it never is, the team just keeps improving it.
**PS:** What are the incentives for employees to incorporate sustainable behaviors into their daily tasks?

**Mike:** The incentive is intrinsic and comes from being part of a team that relentlessly pursues the identification and elimination of waste. The great bonus with using lean tools properly and having respect for others is that managers get to see the growth of adult learners who had forgotten what it was like to be part of a successful team. In the case of business, it is beneficial to use lean tools that always revert to consensus and teamwork, essentially using Deming’s PDCA model.

Anyone who has participated in team sports, played a musical instrument or developed a skill knows that it took practice, typically, with coaching and mentoring. This intrinsic feeling of being valued in an organization is not some abstract goal but one that can be attained when we apply Deming-style thinking. Teams that root out waste and use creativity to make work run faster, better, cheaper and safer evoke the same feelings that most of us experienced in our lives when working on common goals where trust and collaboration were the foundations for winning.

**PS:** How can SH&E professionals demonstrate that each employee adds value to the organization’s social responsibility goals?

**Mike:** We can strongly make the case that injuries and illnesses are waste. However, only about 4% of accidental deaths occur on the job. If we do not make safety a 24/7 value, we are totally missing the boat from an overall societal viewpoint. Once we make safety a value, it stands to reason that we cannot limit our caring to on-the-job safety. Vehicular, home and public safety all come into play.

One of my colleagues from ANSI/AIHA/ASSE Z10 noted that his organization allowed employees to check out things like extension ladders for work at home. When you think about how many people might not buy a proper ladder for a specific job, you begin to appreciate the subtlety of caring for people 24/7. Systems like this will not happen until we truly value the health and well-being of people, on or off the job.

The challenge will be working on something not measurable and addressing risk situations for which management is not responsible or accountable. By the way, Deming is known for commenting, “most important things are unknown and unknowable.” This is pretty insightful for a Ph.D. mathematician. Reducing occupational risk is necessary but no longer sufficient.

**PS:** How can workplaces eliminate psychological issues such as stress, bullying and substance abuse? In what ways can this help an organization achieve the triple bottom line?

**Mike:** Continuous improvement and lean demand teamwork and consensus built upon respect for others. If you have this, you still have to know how to make things better. Lean thinking uncovers the problems. Teams then discover that what they thought was a people problem (pointing fingers at each other) is really a system problem that can be fixed once the problem is identified. Lean thinking using the tool of value stream mapping will usually reveal three to four times as many steps as a knowledgeable worker would identify (see Figure 1). Buried in all these steps is a lot of unrecognized waste that is usually addressed by pointing fingers at workers. Fix the system, not the worker, and you eliminate many things, such as stress, bullying, substance abuse and more.

**PS:** Why should SH&E professionals show salesmanship when integrating safety in the business model?

**Mike:** When production operations are down, risk is typically increased because maintenance workers must do work without the benefit of normal production safeguards. The more uptime there is, the less risk.

**PS:** How can ASSE members contribute to safety and sustainability outside of the workplace?

**Mike:** We can fill the gap that exists with the safety of our families, friends and communities. These off-the-job safety efforts are usually overshadowed by the focus on on-the-job OSHA recordable cases. Safety must become a value 24/7.

**PS:** What are some other resources that SH&E professionals can use to learn more about sustainability and safety’s role in it?

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[www.asse.org/professionalsafety](http://www.asse.org/professionalsafety)
Mike: Do an Internet search for “lean and green,” and you will find hundreds of hits. Unfortunately, it is rare to find a mention of safety. Safety and lean are a natural alignment, should we choose to align them. ANSI B11 TR7 provides guidance on how to better integrate lean and safety built around established risk assessment techniques. The new goal is acceptable risk with minimized waste.

PS: Why is there little mention of safety with regard to the alignment of lean and green? How can SH&E professionals strive to get safety integrated into lean/green initiatives?
Mike: I think part of the issue is that EPA has endorsed the marriage of lean and green for several years and has an excellent website with great information. OSHA has yet to explore the opportunities of lean and safe. It will be up to the profession to make that marriage happen. The best thing that safety professionals can do is immerse themselves in lean thinking and tools, and opportunities for improving safety. For example, instead of choosing a complex root-cause system, ask “why” five times.

Mike Taubitz, senior advisor for FDR Safety LLC, spent 43 years with General Motors in various engineering and human resources positions. He held safety positions ranging from plant safety supervisor to global director of safety and ergonomics. In the late 1990s, he learned lean and continuous improvement thinking for office and business systems and used that as a foundation when he developed and led GM’s emerging issues process from 2000 until retirement in 2008. In this last assignment, Mike spent considerable time in the diverse world of global standards and regulation, creating linkages between operations management and sustainability. He is a frequent speaker at professional and industry group meetings and is often referenced in articles, magazines and technical papers. He is cochair of the National Lean and Safe Network. Mike joined FDR Safety in 2010. There, he manages issues affecting continuous improvement and sustainable growth. He currently serves as secretary to the board of directors for the Michigan Lean Consortium.

The National Lean and Safe Network, an outgrowth of ANSI B11 TR7, is free and open to all interested parties. Its teleconferences and webinars are free, thanks to Pepsico. To sign up, send an email to mtaubitz@fdrsafety.com.
Figure 1

Process Mapping

Example of Current State

Each area where work takes place is a separate line

Note: Process owner originally estimated about 12-15 steps in entire process……