

The Four Fields of Safety Performance

How to Eliminate Workplace Incidents

By Cort Dial

Workplace safety used to be one-dimensional. Today, OSH professionals know better.

Twenty-five years ago, *Professional Safety* published my article, "Incident-Focused Managers: Obstacles to Safety," which appeared in the April 1992 issue (pp. 37-44). In it, I decried the folly of attempting to manage safety by managing safety numbers. I also offered what I knew at the time to be the most advanced methodology for preventing incidents and injuries.

This article is the first in a four-part series that reflects insight gained over the past 25 years and provides detailed guidance on the most modern approach to eliminate workplace incidents.

The Four Fields of Safety Performance

Workplace safety used to be one-dimensional; the focus was on objective phenomena. OSH professionals counted, measured and observed. Strategies emphasized procedures, processes, policies, rules, training programs, priorities and goals, metrics, visions and missions, equipment, tools and facilities. Today, OSH professionals know better.

The traditional, objective, group-based steps are just one aspect of how to make the workplace safer. In total, four aspects exist—I call them the Four Fields of Safety Performance (Figure 1).

The Systems Field

The first field, which comprises traditional actions noted above along with others, is called the systems field. It requires the least amount of knowledge and few skills, and relationships between people do not have to be strong. For these reasons, it is the first place most OSH professionals go. Implementing and following procedures or buying new equipment does not require deep thought or new skills after the initial setup.

Because systems alone do not allow OSH professionals to create an injury-free work environment, most begin to look elsewhere for solutions. At the end of that search, most explored a new realm: the behavior field.

The Behavior Field

The behavior field includes objective actions individuals take: complying with systems and processes; following procedures and rules; communicating priorities and goals; measuring, assessing and holding each other accountable; properly using and maintaining equipment, tools and facilities; sharing lessons learned; acknowledging the proper actions of others; intervening and redirecting someone's improper actions; and halting activities that have immediate catastrophic potential.

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FIGURE 1

The Four Fields of Safety Performance



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In the 1980s, my associates and I became proficient in the behavior field. I was a safety engineer in a large chemical corporation, that used behavior-based safety processes in all its facilities. Safety performance drastically improved.

But a few years in, issues emerged. Behavior-based safety strategies are resource intensive. Each process required program facilitators, steering teams, observers, people to collate and analyze observation data, and a work team's time to use and apply the data. Although the processes had a positive effect, the results could not be sustained without a huge, expensive bureaucracy to keep them afloat.

Additionally, the effect of the behavior-based safety processes plateaued over time. They were effective in minimizing incidents that involve objective behaviors such as how one positions and uses one's body or maintains and uses tools, but the processes did not address less tangible incident causes such as errors, oversights, or less-than-optimum decisions, choices, attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and intentions. Because these causes were not being addressed, the company continued to have serious injuries and fatalities. At the time, the company employed more than 80,000 people, and recorded 8 to 10 fatalities every year. It became clear that the system and behavior fields alone are not enough.

The Self & Social Fields

Around the time I started questioning the comprehensiveness of our safety approach, I left

the chemical company and began consulting. One of my first projects was a major capital project in Saudi Arabia. I was coaching a large petrochemical company in the construction of a new refining facility. It soon became apparent that the workforce and leadership were much less advanced when it came to safety than I was accustomed to in the U.S.

The project also had an aggressive schedule. We had no time to install complex systems and behavioral processes. That meant with few exceptions, the system and behavior fields were out. The challenge was daunting: figure out how to keep thousands of unskilled migrant workers from 29 different countries free of injury without the help of traditional approaches.

Not only did we accomplish this, but the project was completed with the best safety performance in company history. Millions of work hours were logged without a single person leaving the project site for medical attention.

How did we do it? In the deserts of Saudi Arabia, I discovered the self and social fields, the most

effective and least utilized of the four fields. They are underused because they are difficult to implement, but if one is willing to invest the time and work necessary, these fields will create a means to safety performance once thought impossible.

The subjective, internal, individual phenomena that make up the self field are extremely powerful determinants of performance. Concepts such as self-image and confidence come into play, and leaders who work in the self field are actually changing the way their people see themselves.

If the self field is *me*, the social field is *we*. Customs, covenants and other group activities and issues make up this realm, which trumps all three of the other fields. Building teams in the social field will augment what is possible in the self, behavior and systems fields, which all add up to life-changing and life-saving safety performance.

The next three articles in this series will provide practical ways to immediately begin to work in the self and social fields, and to make dramatic changes in your organization.



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The Self Field of Safety Performance

Looking in the Mirror

By Cort Dial

The self field is crucial when it comes to safety performance because safety inherently values individual lives.

This is the second part of a four-part series that unpacks a modern approach to improving safety in the workplace.

Traditionally, safety performance has focused on hard data and rules. The dependency is understandable, but as discussed in Part 1 (*PS*, Sept. 2017, pp. 22-23), an exclusive reliance on numbers and programs, or what I call the systems and behavior fields (Figure 1), is a mistake.

Managers, supervisors and other leaders willing to delve into a third field, the self, open themselves and their organizations to another level of performance. The self field is exactly what it appears to be: who you truly are, which encompasses subjective, internal, individual concepts such as values, knowledge, beliefs and self-image.

But how does this come into play at work? And why is superior performance enabled by it? The self field is crucial when it comes to safety performance because safety inherently values individual lives. Every "self" matters. When we think solely in terms of numbers and processes, we dehumanize one another, which contradicts the heart of safety itself. That is why neglecting the self field greatly limits performance.

In all aspects of business performance, but especially safety, how you see yourself matters. You can never outperform your own self-image. To create an incident-free workplace, all workers must believe that such a workplace is possible and that they have the ability to make it happen. It is the leader's responsibility to cultivate these beliefs in every individual team member (including the leader). Because this field involves working with minds and hearts, rather than tangible operations, working in the self field is difficult, especially for leaders who primarily value what they can see, hold and measure.

A warning for those who are fixated on the tangible and data-driven world: Numerical safety goals are dehumanizing. They turn humans into faceless figures. A company may demand such goals, but that does not mean the safety leader must share them.

The Self Is the Foundation

To create a workplace that operates without harming anyone or anything, a company must dig into the self field. The biggest obstacle to working injury-free is pretty simple: Most people do not believe they are capable of that level of performance. Put another way, they do not believe in themselves.

This is why the self is so important. What each person believes about him/herself will determine what programs that individual will embrace, what systems s/he will create, what behaviors s/he will choose to

exhibit and much more. Development in this area is foundational and essential.

So where to begin? First, understand that a leader works in the self field on two levels: the development of employees' selves and development of his/her own self.

Developing Others

Helping others to cultivate better self-images and establish key beliefs requires awareness, consistency and intention. Here is where to start:

- **Spend one-on-one time with each employee.**

Get to know each person, and learn specific ways to praise the unique gifts that person brings to the table. Ask what s/he loves and inquire about goals. Even just spending 30 minutes a few times a week for individual chats is a huge step. These interactions build people's confidence and make them feel appreciated, which helps establish trust and a sense of belonging. Trust is essential when seeking to transform workplace culture. People give more of themselves to a group to which they belong.

- **Offer opportunities for personal growth.** A leader cannot make anyone choose to develop him/herself, but a leader can provide real opportunities for such development. Encourage a young, rising leader to take a course on inspirational leadership or emotional intelligence, or assign a promising safety engineer to lead a new project. The benefits are twofold: 1) the leader shows employees s/he cares and is paying attention; and 2) a stronger team will emerge.

FIGURE 1

The Four Fields of Safety Performance



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•**Relinquish control.** A leader cannot force anyone to want to, then do the work needed to, look inside. Preaching safety, imposing systems and demanding behaviors will deliver no results if employees do not believe in themselves and the group. A leader must also realize that some people will simply ignore or reject such an effort. Do it anyway.

Developing Yourself

To be the change you want to see, you must reflect honestly and work to express who you are and what you believe. Here is where to start:

•**Model self-improvement.** If encouraging employees to take a course, read a book or tackle a new challenge, they will more likely take those

risks and extra work if they see the leader doing the same. A shared culture of development and learning breeds self-confidence and collective pride, not to mention smarter solutions.

•**Have consistent self-evaluations.** Take the time to slow down and evaluate thoughts and actions. What are your goals? What have you done to get there? The best leaders also are open to feedback from employees. Sit down and ask what you could do better, then adjust where it makes sense. Never criticize someone for being honest. Speaking truth to power requires immense courage. Chances are, that person should be elevated, not ostracized.

•**Be the commitment you ask of others.** Be a walking, talking embodiment of the state of being you want your team to embrace. Speak confidently that the work performed, no matter how hazardous, can be completed without harming anyone. Foster belief by believing first.

The only acceptable goal when it comes to safety is zero, or, to put it more humanely, harming no one. If you take the steps outlined and commit to them, you will be amazed by the culture created. And, you will be ready for work in the fourth and most powerful field, the social field, which will be the focus of Part 3 in the November 2017 issue.

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The Social Field of Safety Performance

Building Transformative Bonds

By Cort Dial

As I wrote in Part 1 of this four-part series on modern safety performance, if the self field is *me*, the social field is *we*. The social field is the focus of this article (the third in the series). Relationships determine success in this realm, making it the most powerful and intimidating of the four fields.

What makes up the social field? Subjective concepts that are internal and shared by the entire group: customs, social mores, covenants, myths, legends, wisdom, protocols, visions, missions, goals and more. Those collective ideas are spread and reinforced most effectively between people with strong relationships and inspirational leaders.

The Most Powerful Field

What is happening in the social field nearly always trumps every other field. That is a bold statement, but it is rooted in science. Researchers believe our brains are hardwired to pursue group harmony because it was instrumental in ensuring the early survival of our species as we wandered around, hunting and gathering. Those instincts are still present.

Only someone with a highly developed sense of self can resist the social field's pull. We have all experienced peer pressure, which can lead to either rebellion or commitment. If your colleagues reject certain beliefs, you are more likely to dismiss those ideas, too, even if the rejection contradicts your personal values. If peers embrace a way of being, you are more likely to strive for that ideal.

With respect to safety performance, it is easy to see why the social field is critical. Safety is not an independent exercise. We depend on each other to create

safe spaces; these spaces result from people taking care of each other. As teams become more in sync, higher levels of safety performance become possible.

Social vs. Culture

Like the self field, many leaders are unwilling or even unable to work in the social field. Some think they are making progress in this area and call it culture. This is actually a mischaracterization of culture, which is not the social field, but rather the sum of all four fields—systems, behavior, self and social. A healthy safety culture can only be created and sustained by an organization comprised of people who work well in all four fields.

Working in the Social Field

Work in the social field demands consistency, inclusion and patience. Here's how to get started:

- **Plan an immersive event.** Gathering for long periods creates opportunities for social bonds to form. Give employees time to get to know each other. It may seem trite, but it is incredibly important and powerful. Whereas working on the self is a solitary exercise, working on the social is a group affair that requires gathering the community together.

- **Establish routine together time.** Plan regular times for community. Weekly lunches or coffees are a great start. Do not talk business at these mini-gatherings. Just be together.

- **Model camaraderie.** Take the time to stop and talk to people in the halls. Learn names and important details about everyone, no matter their position.

- **Agree on something, then add to it.** Get everyone together and establish an agreement. For example, forge a shared belief that working without injury is possible, or agree that each person promises to intervene if s/he witnesses another person at risk. This is the foundation on which you will ultimately realize a mission (e.g., an injury-free workplace).

- **Let go.** Leaders cannot force anyone to give their peers a helping hand or to believe in your vision. Stop trying to enforce rules and policies. The team will decide what to embrace. Leaders simply must provide the opportunities for the right decisions to be made.

- **Work regularly and well in the other three fields.** To make the most progress possible in the social field, you must be proficient in the systems, behavior and self fields first. While social trumps the other three fields, it also relies on them.

Systems are important, but it is the social makeup of the group using the system that is the ultimate determinant of any system's effectiveness. One need only watch a busy crosswalk for a few minutes to see that the social customs of jaywalking or speeding can trump a well-designed traffic system.

Ultimately, it boils down to this: Take your team's humanity into account. Leverage it or be derailed by it. It is entirely up to you.

Safety is not an independent exercise. We depend on each other to create safe spaces.

FIGURE 1

The Four Fields of Safety Performance



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Maximizing the Four Fields of Safety Performance

All-In Leadership

By Cort Dial

This is the fourth and final installment of a four-part series that presents a modern approach to improving safety in the workplace.

Hardware & Software

Now that we have addressed the two most challenging areas of the four fields of safety performance, we can zoom out and consider how the four fields function as a whole. Put systems and behavior together, then yoke self and social. The relationship between the two pairs is like the relationship between hardware and software in a high-performing computer. An elite piece of computer hardware is of little value without equally well-developed software. If an organization has top-tier hardware (i.e., well-developed systems and behavior) but underdeveloped software (i.e., the self and social fields), then the organization's overall performance will fall far short of its potential.

I have spent the past 2 decades helping organizations understand that model. Typically, I am introducing the self and social fields to groups that already excel in the systems and behavior fields. I have repeatedly found that the key to progress is the organization's senior-most leader. If this leader is open to the softer, less tangible side of performance and willing to be coached in the self and social fields, limits on performance are obliterated. I call these people "all-in leaders."

The All-In Leader

All-in leaders are 21st century pacesetters, architects of extraordinary performance and promoters of humanity in the workplace. They apply human-based influencing and decision making that ensure that they and the companies they lead are in harmony with profitability, sustainability and meaningful work for employees.

These unique leaders see business and safety performance through a wider, definitively human lens. All-in leaders understand:

- 1) The most effective tool they have for creating safety performance is their leadership.
- 2) Better and more sustainable performance can be created through people rather than systems or behavior programs.
- 3) People and the planet are whos, not its. Therefore, it is unacceptable to produce business results at the expense of either.

Once you truly believe those three things, you are ready to build the environment necessary for top safety performance to occur.

The Five Conditions of Performance

When beginning work in the self and social fields, a leader can help create five emotional conditions in people. I call them the five conditions of performance. Those who have read this four-part series will recognize several of the core ideas presented, from the action steps outlined in parts 2 and 3 (October and November 2017, respectively). Here they are, the key factors for top performance.

tober and November 2017, respectively). Here they are, the key factors for top performance.

1) A Big Game to Play

As a leader, your vision is the big game you ask the team to play. The bigger the game, the more followers you attract and healthy disruption you create. A goal to reduce hand injuries by 20% is not inspiring, and not big game. Creating a workplace in which people do not get hurt; completing a major construction project without incident or injury: these are big games.

Setting inspiring safety goals is especially difficult because they often involve eliminating or reducing incidents and injuries, and people do not get excited by avoiding something that is already unwanted. People are invigorated by the idea of creating something desirable and new, and are more likely to give more to a leader who calls on them to accomplish something grand. So, frame the big game differently: What game can you create that will inspire people to do something extraordinary?

2) Commitment to & Confidence in Victory

All-in leaders achieve commitment to and confidence in victory when followers believe 1) that they, their leaders and their teammates are fully committed to the big game; and 2) that the big game is a goal they can and will achieve. Most leaders spend too much time explaining how to get there, while all-in leaders drive conversations that explore why committing makes sense and by noticeably demonstrate their unwavering commitment.

3) Positive Self-Image

Both leaders and team members must cultivate positive self-image to achieve extraordinary results. Think back to the discussion of the self field (October 2017): No one can outperform his/her own self-image. As a leader, you must develop the self-images of followers. Tell them they are who and what you want them to be. Thank them for what they do well. Encouragement works because people develop self-image by listening both to what others say about and to us, as well as what we say to ourselves.

4) Sense of Belonging

Fostering a sense of belonging is one of the most important conditions. It is also one of the

All-in leaders see business and safety performance through a wider, definitively human lens.



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Free Book Excerpt to PS Readers

As a thank you for sticking with this series, please enjoy an excerpt from Dial's book, *Heroes to Heroics: A Memoir on Modern Leadership* (on his website, <http://bit.ly/2ANK1pl>), which takes an in-depth look at how he used these concepts to complete a major capital project requiring 8 million work-hours in the Middle East, all without harming anyone.

most difficult for corporate leaders to discuss. Belonging is especially crucial when it comes to safety. When you belong, you are willing to do whatever it takes to protect the group you belong to. Belonging is just another word for feeling loved. People are designed to care for each other, not merely romantically, but in a humanistic, fraternal way. A deep desire to belong has been programmed into our DNA. Mother Nature takes advantage of the power of belonging; so can you.

5) Opportunities for Personal Growth

All-in leaders give followers chances to learn, be challenged and develop in various ways that are always in service of a shared vision and mission. Today's workers are as interested in acquiring positive experiences and personal growth as they are material things. You cannot make anyone decide to grow, but you can ensure that opportunities to do so exist.

Conclusion

Rules and other rote, surface-level paradigms can only get you so far. Your performance will al-

FIGURE 1

The Four Fields of Safety Performance



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ways be limited by your weakest field. Commit to the safety goal of never harming anyone or anything, then dive into the self and social fields to make that vision a reality. Become the all-in leader you can and want to be. Profits will soar, performance will break records and personal fulfillment for every individual will reach life-affirming highs.

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