



Problems of the Safety Professional: How can I get my boss to listen to me?

During my several years of teaching at New York University, the question I most frequently heard from Safety Professionals returning to school was, "How can I get my boss to listen to me?" In responding to this question, I would often reply, "Let's examine what you are saying and how you are saying it, then see if your messages contain information your boss wants or needs to hear." I might have added, "Let's examine your own capabilities, knowledge, and attitudes as well." I frequently hear the same question today.

Several underlying issues are involved in this basic problem of the Safety Professional, some of which I would like to address in this and future editorials.

Hopefully the thoughts I have on these subjects will be of interest to you, and perhaps lead you to a further exploration of the published literature.

How do these topics relate to the basic issue of "getting the boss to listen?" Obviously there are no "magic formulas" that apply to every boss (and some bosses are just plain difficult to work with). However, there are certain approaches that seem to produce more effective results than others. I have found that understanding and applying the body of knowledge encompassed by these and other subjects has been very useful in getting through to the boss. Resources available through your Society can also make useful contributions to the solution of the problem.

A good place to start in our search for answers to this question is in the boss's own world. What is *he* thinking about? What is his job as *he* sees it? What is *his* value system? What motivates *him* to action? What are *his* decision processes? What does the organization require of *him*, and how does he satisfy *his* superiors? Once we find answers to these questions, then we must examine our own job knowledge and skills, our own methods of relating to the boss, and the contributions of our work to the organization and to the accomplishment of our boss's goals and objectives.

Establishing personal credibility is important. The authority of the Safety Professional is that of knowledge and the soundness of the information he provides.

One component of success is the ability to gather well-documented facts based on valid and reliable measures of safety performance. Another is effectiveness in providing managers with accurate decision-making information. A third is the ability to step back far enough from day-to-day operations to observe objectively the entire system by which an organization is run, rather than functioning as a specialist intent on examining the safety aspects alone. The Safety Professional must possess the experience, skills, and knowledge necessary to evaluate and analyze systems used by managers for the control of costs, human and material losses, and production quantity and quality. Because he deals with people, the Safety Professional must have the special skills necessary to convey his ideas, conclusions, and recommendations by verbal, written, and visual communication methods. Using the minimization of loss potential and the maximization of performance reliability as criteria, the Safety Professional must be able to appraise various systems components at the planning, design, development, test, installation, and operation stages to assure optimum integration of safety considerations. His concern for before-the-loss problem analysis, his contributions to product design and development, and his use of more objective techniques of systems performance appraisal will make him a vital member of the management team as he works with others to stress the scientific, the economic and the management aspects of loss prevention programs and their contributions to the critical functions of total system performance.

If you acquire and demonstrate all of these abilities, will your boss listen to you? Probably. If not, you will have developed so many useful skills that other potential bosses will most certainly begin to notice you.

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