

It's Not My Job!

Understanding Roles and Responsibilities in Safety
Management

By Mark D. Norton

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Tired of consistently having to deal with unplanned workplace events resulting in injuries and illnesses to your employees, damage to process equipment and negative effects on quality, morale and yes even production?

What if you or your organization learned how to effectively use some simple tools allowing you to take your safety management system to the next level? In return, you become more effective at protecting the health and well-being of your employees, improving morale, quality, production, and competitive standing within your market.

Let Norton Safety Services work with you to identify those disconnects which perpetuate the cycle of injury and loss, and put you on track towards a healthier, happier workforce, sustaining improvements in all areas of the company.

About the Author

Mark Norton is the founder of Norton Safety Services, a firm dedicated to helping businesses minimize loss and maximize human potential with respect to internal safety & health management. His safety & health career began 29 years ago in the United States Coast Guard. In 1987 he began his career with the Arizona Division of Occupational Safety & Health, (state OSHA). He has held several positions within the agency from Safety Compliance Officer, working up to Assistant Director with oversight for all compliance activity in Southern Arizona, additionally, Consultation Program Manager and VPP Coordinator managing all cooperative programs such as VPP, SHARP, and partnerships throughout all of Arizona.

Mark has collaborated with hundreds of companies, performing thousands of onsite inspections, accident, fatality and complaint investigations. He has authored many articles on safety and health issues and published two books on the subject. In his second endeavor entitled "If You Could See What I See", Mark peels away at the elements of an effective safety management system using the VPP model, giving a practical first hand look at common mistakes made by employers and employees in the management of their S&H systems, and provides recommended solutions.

Whether the request is for a specific topic or a keynote address, Mark is a captivating, and effective speaker on the subject of safety & health management. Blending both experience and observation, with a bit of humor, his highly sought after message helps to motivate, and educate stakeholders on ways to become more effective in their commitment towards safety and health. Mark has delivered his powerful message to audiences such as the Voluntary Protection Program Participants Association, Marine Corp Base Hawaii, Constellation Wineries, ASSE, American Bar Association, SAHBA, AGC, HBACA and many others.

Mark holds a BS in Business Management and an MA in Organizational Management. His safety accolades include the United States Coast Guard Achievement Medal, United States Coast Guard Letter of Commendation, City of Tucson Public Service Excellence Award, 2008 VPPPA Chairman's Recognition Award (a national award), and most recently, 2009 ASSE Safety Professional of the Year for Southern Arizona. When he is not working, Mark enjoys spending time with his wife and two children, playing guitar and writing poetry.

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Introduction

It's Not My Job! How many times have we heard that before? It doesn't matter if we are talking about a sales project, running an errand, cleaning up around the house, fixing a broken chair, typing an office memo or thousands of other tasks on any given day of the week. We have all heard or used that line a hundred times and for the most part, when we do, nothing happens. No one is hurt, no one suffers and the work, whatever it may be, is postponed until eventually someone comes along and decides that its time to get it done and takes on the assignment.

What I want to discuss in this short interactive workbook are those times where this mentality allows for people to get injured and in many cases killed. I have placed within these pages some real life examples of problems, and ways to spot them. In addition, I have organized the material so that you as employers, managers, employees, safety representatives and safety committee members can use this book within your specific organization to spark discussion and encourage change. Designed as a workbook, each member of the organization

can obtain a copy of the book, complete the simple exercises and examine their own behaviors related to safety & health. It is a great tool to spark discussions related to safety & health behaviors for your next safety meeting. Get your managers, employees, and committee members talking about safety on a different level! In doing this I am positive you will identify some very real disconnects within your safety & health management system and obtain answers from the exercises which can go a long way towards making valuable improvements to your system.

Remember in the arena of workplace safety, the phrase, “it’s not my job” is a deal breaker. It allows for unsafe work practices, habits, conditions and policies to go unchallenged and unchanged. My plan is not for this to be a lengthy discussion, but one in which I can make you think about responsibility and where it lies within each of us.

Many of you are working for employers who have taken the time and expended the resources to set up what they feel are very effective safety and health programs. In some cases that holds true, in others you soon learn, usually when it is too late, that the program is flawed. Flaws come in various forms, but they usually all have one thing in common. Can you guess what that commonality is?

It doesn't matter if you're working for a framing company, or a manufacturing company, a post office or a funeral home, the one thing each and every establishment has in common is us! People...people like you and I who, in many cases simply go about our business never thinking anything negative will happen to us. People who think the rules apply, but on occasions they aren't that important. These same people carry out the marching orders, install the machinery, deliver the product, and implement all types of other measures, but who, with the utterance of one simple phrase "its not my job", short circuit the efforts taken by all to ensure a safe and healthy workplace.

I ask one simple question: When it comes to safety, if it's not your job, then whose is it? Who is responsible to ensure that the rules are followed? Better yet, who is responsible to ensure the rules are even established?

Who is responsible for making sure guards are in place on the 2 ton mechanical power press you are operating right now? Who is it that is going to provide you with the training on those chemicals you're using?

Lastly who is responsible for making sure that you wear the proper Personal Protective Equipment, (PPE) when you're using the table saw?

As you may have gathered already that responsibility rests in different hands, but one thing is for sure, each and every one of us has some responsibility for ensuring that we are doing the right things. Let me see if I can get you to see it in another light.

Chapter I

Safety Defined

How would you define the term Safety? This is a question I often pose to students when I am facilitating one of my classes. You may think this is a relatively simple question. We hear the term “safety” all the time. People tell you to be safe when you are driving, be safe at work, be safe when you are swimming. When we hear the words do we really give them much thought? When I do pose this question the answers are varied. Usually I am met with silence initially. I have often wondered why, since the question is not that hard. Then it dawns on me, they do not answer because it is not their job... After a few seconds of prodding I get answers. Let’s see what you think, write your answer here:

See if parts of your answer are similar to the some of the ones I have heard.

Samples of answers received include:

- Don't get hurt...
- Be careful...
- Go home in one piece...
- Don't do something stupid...
- Follow the rules...

The list can go on and on. While the examples of answers given above indicate that we are trying to “be safe”, the very nature of these answers demonstrates there are other things we have to consider. This always leads to my second question, shortly after the start of the class;

“How do we ensure that we don't get hurt; that we are careful; that we go home in one piece”?

To get to that answer lets first look at the dictionary definition of “Safety” as defined in Merriam Webster's online dictionary, (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Safety):

“Safety – The condition of being safe from undergoing or causing hurt, injury or loss”

Using that definition we can see that the objective of safety is to prevent hurt or injury, which I would like to point out means we are dealing withpeople. Think about it, can you injure a machine? To say you hurt the grinder is really misleading since it does not feel pain.

I often tell students I have never met a machine that goes home to its family at the end of the day.

The other element in that definition is loss. You can sustain loss by damaging people as well as machinery, property and equipment. So, for those of you who never made the connection, safety is about protecting us from loss. Injury & illnesses are losses. They have no positive impact on a company’s bottom line and often times are detractors from morale, production, quality and timeliness. Safety is about people, and it is about sending them home in the same condition that they came to work in.

To ensure that we are accomplishing this thing called safety certain conditions have to be in place. We can’t wish it upon a company. If that were possible I

would be out of work. To truly achieve safety, very specific concepts or elements of a safety management system must be in place and operating efficiently.

Note here I did not say “program”. There is a reason for that, (I will explain later). Think about this next question and write your answers in the spaces provided.

You have just been given the additional task of the company safety director for a small metal fabrication shop consisting of 150 employees. Your budget is \$25,000.00. What can you do with that money? (Play the role and list some of what you might get)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

Several things came to mind regarding what you might do as the new safety manager. You may have to develop the policies, obtain PPE, get training materials, purchase specialized guarding, and more. Eventually you spend all the money so now you're done. Right...? You have the safety management system in place. ***Now you can relax...?***

Yes

No

Hopefully you picked no. The simple fact that you threw money at it does not mean you have it. I have worked for many years with thousands of companies who threw money at the problem and have not figured it out yet. Let me illustrate my point:

In the mid 1990's while working as a compliance officer for state OSHA in Arizona I was assigned to investigate an explosion in a manufacturing plant. The company was a large manufacturing company whose product process involved the mixing and blending of

certain chemicals, which when completed created an explosive of sorts.

At some point they started having “incidents”. Eventually one of those incidents or process upsets, as I will call them, resulted in the death of an employee.

That is where I come in. Upon arrival in the facility, I was presented with many examples of excellent safety & health documents, drawings, process diagrams, MSDS sheets etc. In fact when it came to the documentation they spent hundreds of thousands of dollars trying to obtain “Safety”. One would think after looking at the energy and effort spent on obtaining documentation that this company possessed, that they “got it”. They had that safety culture we are looking for.

If that were true, then how could this event happen? While it is true that no matter how good the program may be, there are no guarantees. One would think if programs were effective as explained in the documentation, the risk would be minimal. Still, in the end there was an event and someone died as a result of that event.

After the first few days of my investigation I was questioned by my management at the time, about my

findings thus far. Initially I told them, *“If the rest of the inspection were as good as the documentation I reviewed it might be hard to pinpoint the reason for the accident”*. Shortly after that I moved the investigation to the next phase. I went out into the production area and started looking at the equipment and the processes. More importantly, I started talking to employees. What I found truly surprised me. It soon became evident that the policies and procedures in the manuals I had initially reviewed, those same manuals the employer “threw” all those resources at, were in fact, not being followed. Items such as safety practices were circumvented, preventive maintenance routines were not consistently followed, and repairs were postponed until a more suitable time. Whatever that means! Does this sound familiar?

Why, you might be wondering? Do you really need to ask? Think about your situation right now where you work.

- What types of timelines are you facing?
- What production goals are you required to hit and what happens when you do not meet them?

If you have not figured it out already, the main reasons for the deviations are simple and much more common than you may think. This particular company, at this current moment in time, was more concerned with production than anything else.

In the words of one manager within the facility, *“these events such as the one you’re investigating are a part of doing business, this stuff is dangerous and we expect these things to happen.”*

Do you think that particular manager really understood the definition of safety? Still, they would have told you, as they did me, that they had an excellent safety & health management system. On paper they were correct, they did, in practice however, it was lacking in so many fundamental areas.

The art of creating and maintaining a safe work environment, better yet a safety minded culture is not something that is going to get done simply by throwing money at it, sitting back and saying *“it’s done.”* This requires commitment. Commitment from everyone within the organization from the CEO or senior site manager, to the person hired yesterday. In fact when present, a strong

safety culture helps to orient the new employees to their new environment.

What makes this task difficult are the variables. Consider some of the more obvious variables dealing just with the human side of the equation. Consider variables such as; **beliefs, values, experiences, culture and attitude.** Now think of those with respect to your place of employment: Think about these points.

- What are the employee's beliefs?
- How is the company shaping those beliefs?
- How are the beliefs, values and experiences of employees shaping the attitudes and behaviors?
- What is the institutional behavior with respect to safety & health management?

Then approach it in more detail by looking at the following points and attempt to generate some dialogue around these areas.

- Is every individual the same?
- Do they view the risks the same?

- Do they come equipped with the same level of awareness and knowledge?
- Do they care as much about your company as you do?
- Do they place a premium on their safety and that of their co-worker?

In most cases the answer is no. They are as different as night and day. Add to the equation those elements related to the business side of things. Elements such as:

- Production demands
- Quality concerns
- On time delivery
- Overhead
- Complexity of operations
- Availability of resources
- Safety Awareness
- Knowledge of the hazards present

There is so much more we could list here but you start to see that this is truly a large undertaking. What's that? You noticed I placed the safety related issues at the bottom of the list. Good for you, but I did it for a reason. For many of you reading this, that is where you have placed it within your organization. Don't believe me? Read and answer the following simple question:

“When was the last time I either allowed, encouraged or participated in a shortcut that could have lead to a safety event (negative) due to concerns over any one of the first six bullets listed directly above? Concerns over production demands, quality, delivery, overhead, complexity or resources?”

If you're being honest right now, and I hope you are, I bet you can probably think of several times: **I challenge you to write just one of them in detail and then I want you to write down what the outcome could have been had it all gone wrong:**
