

Safety Communication for Executives

Crafting Messages That Resonate Across All Levels of the Organization

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Julia Jardine, MPH

Loss Control Specialist



Heavy Metal Epidemiology Research

MPH EOHS from CUNY SPH



Public Health Communication & Fundraising



Conservation Communication for NYS Parks

The Level Set

“Safety is not a priority at Alcoa. It is a pre-condition. It’s like breathing – you can’t do much else if you don’t remember to breathe.”

- Paul O’Neill, Alcoa

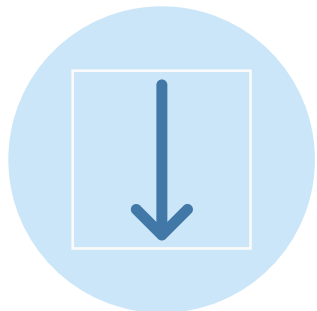
Safety Is a Financial Strategy



\$2 - \$4.01 ROI per \$1 invested



Safety performance predicts stock performance



Prevention costs 16 to 48x less than incidents



OSHA citations lead to immediate firm value loss



WHAT YOU'LL WALK AWAY WITH

1. How to make safety messages actually drive behavior
2. How communication shapes engagement & compliance
3. Practical tools you can use immediately



The Foundation is Your Vision

- **The Problem:** You can't communicate without a shared definition.
- **The Question:** What does "safety" mean to you?
- **Common Definitions:**
 - Absence of injury (lagging indicator)
 - Compliance with procedures (behavioral)
 - A state of being where people can do their jobs without unnecessary risk (systems-based)
- **The Work:** Executives must spend time defining safety, vision, and mission *together before* setting goals
- **Why It Matters:** Saves time and aligns the path forward



BHOPAL — Cascade of Failures that Began with Communication

December 3, 1984. Bhopal, India

- Workers knew. Warnings existed
- No one on the ground *had the authority to speak up*
- 500,000+ exposed
- The world's worst industrial disaster
- A broken system
- Began with management communication of safety beliefs

The Science of Safety Communication



You can't do both

Blame &
Punish

Learn & Grow



Beyond Zero – Moving the Goal Post

The Old Goal: Zero Incidents



The Problem: Zero injuries is a lagging indicator. It tells you what happened, *not what's going to happen.*

The Shift: Beyond Zero



The New Goal:
Beyond Zero

What This Means:
We're not just counting injuries; we're building systems that prevent them

Leading Indicators:
Observations, near-misses, stop-work events, conversations, feedback

Kahneman: Your Workers are on Autopilot

(Slow vs Fast thinking)

- **The Problem:** Most work happens on autopilot
- **The Solution:** Good safety communication snaps people out of autopilot into slow, deliberate thinking
- **The Question For You:** *How do you design communication that interrupts autopilot?*

Trust is not a soft skill. It's a safety metric.

TYPE OF
INJURY

SEVERITY
OF INJURY

LACK OF
TRUST IN
LEADERSHIP

Treated with dignity and respect — every day, by everyone they encounter. That unlocks ***discretionary energy***. It swells into everything. It creates pride in the organization.

— *Paul O'Neill, CEO of Alcoa*

Tools You Can Use

“Safety is not a gadget but a state of mind.” - Eleanor Everet



The Anatomy of a Safety Message

How you deliver the message matters as much as the message itself

Element	What It Means	Example
The Why	Connect to values, not rules	“We want you home tonight.”
The What	Clear, specific behavior	“That means stopping work when something feels off.”
The You	Make it personal to the listener	“You have the authority. Use it.”
The We	Signal leadership commitment	“And we will back you every time.”

Channels, Cadence, Consistency

How you deliver the message matters as much as the message itself

- **Channels:** Toolbox talks, all-hands meetings, one-on-ones, written communications, walk-throughs
- **Cadence:** Safety messaging must be regular, not reactive
- **Consistency:** Culture is shown, not just said
- **The 3-sentence rule:** Concise safety vision readiness at all times



Catch people before they fall.

1. Walk the floor.
 2. Look for safe behavior.
 3. Name it now. “I saw that.”
 4. Thank them now. “That matters. Thank you.”
- There’s no magic bullet in safety, but positive reinforcement is as close as it gets.
 - Behavior that is recognized is repeated.



Stop Work Authority

On Paper:

- Workers can stop unsafe work.
- It's in the manual. They signed.

In Practice:

- Have they ever used it?
- Do they trust you'll back them?
- If never used: something is wrong.

Ensure
there's
time to
debrief.

CHECK IN

SURFACE ISSUES

REINFORCE & ADJUST

Ask before you answer,
and then ask again.



Listen first



Diagnose the need



Then respond



Build trust in the
exchange

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

- George Bernard Shaw

What you measure is what you get.

TRIR Trap:

- Rewards low reporting
- Hides the real picture
- Erodes trust

Leading Indicators:

- Near-miss reporting
- Stop-work events
- Safety conversations
- Trust scores

The culture will reveal itself if you know how to hear it.

- “We usually wear PPE, except when things get backed up like this. It is what it is. We have a deadline and we have to just be extra careful without it.”
- “These are the risks we signed up for.”
- “That’s why we have employees sign off on the policy.”
- “I can’t control them when I’m not there.”
- “They just want to take the day off.”

Safety is about accountability.

Now, take these questions to **your** employees:



Do workers understand our safety vision?



Do they see their feedback acted on?



Do they believe we care about them?



How can you be sure you have the right answers?



Do they feel safe speaking up?



Do they see us modeling safe behavior?

We bring our whole lives to work.



The background is a solid dark blue color. It features several semi-transparent, light blue speech bubbles of various sizes scattered across the page. Some of these bubbles contain a white question mark. The overall theme is communication and inquiry.

Questions?

Please email additional questions to losscontrol@bhhc.com