

Q&A With James Johnson, Senior Director, Workplace Safety Initiatives, National Safety Council

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James Johnson is responsible for leading National Safety Council advocacy initiatives to reduce deaths and injuries associated with workplace safety. Mr. Johnson works with a diverse group of stakeholders to establish and promote best practices for safety and health processes affecting employees on-the-job.

With more than 30 years experience as a safety and health consultant, project manager, and team manager, Mr. Johnson has led development and delivery of progressive safety solutions for companies of all sizes and industries. He has managed multiple risk control disciplines, helping them to align strategy to actionable and measurable initiatives for continuous, sustainable improvement, and world-class performance.

Mr. Johnson holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Stanford University. A past member of the NSC Board of Directors, he is a professional member of the American Society of Safety Engineers and past president of its Boston chapter.



IMPO: Discuss the reasons for developing the “journey to safety excellence” strategy.

JJ: One definition for journey is “passage or progress from one stage to another,” suggesting that it is more than simply reaching a final destination and an end point, but rather it is a path followed with lessons learned providing direction for the continued journey. The NSC wants to reinforce this concept with companies; namely, that while safety excellence is attainable, there will always be the opportunity for continued progress and improvement. The journey is an iterative process that supports continued reduction of workplace risk and has as its goal zero workplace injuries.

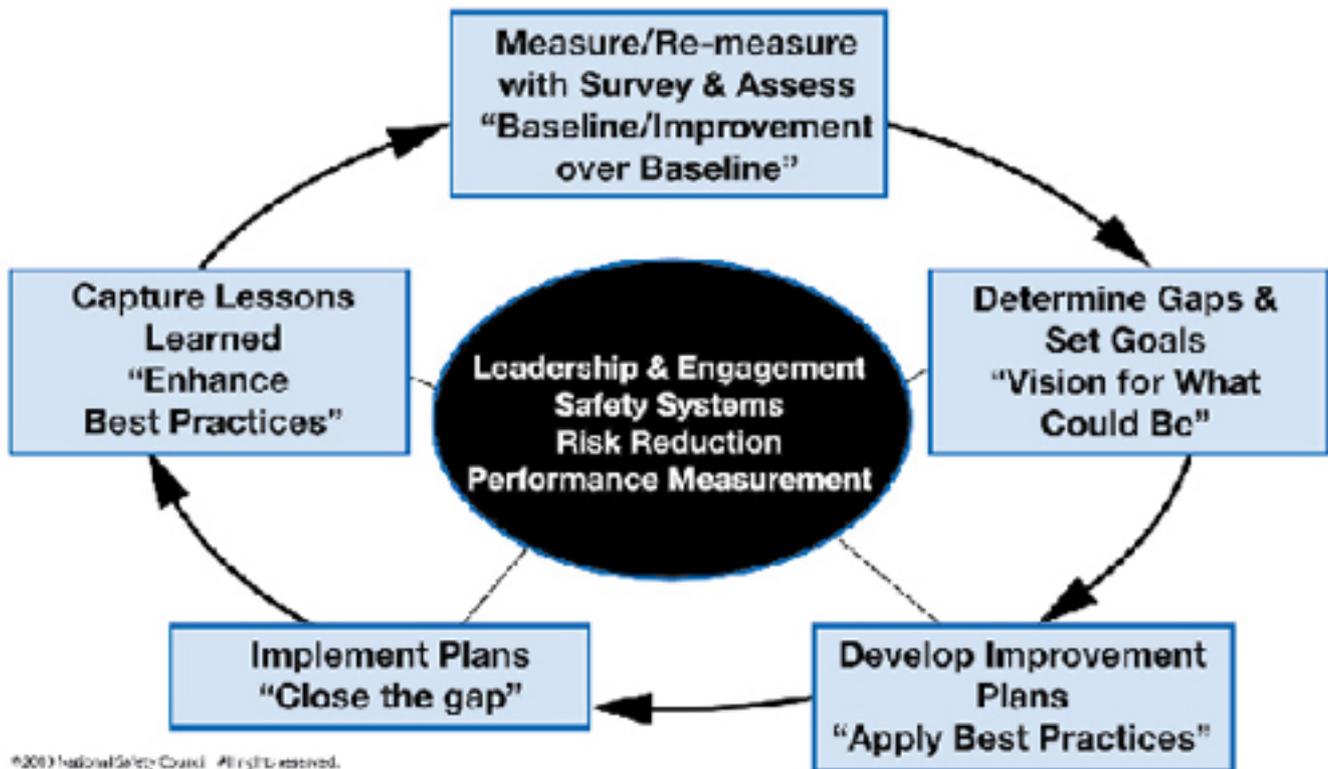
IMPO: What are the key elements to this approach?

JJ: There are four key elements to the journey to safety excellence. Each is important unto itself and in relation to each of the other elements. The elements are interdependent, and when fully integrated as a workplace safety strategy—and working in concert with other improvement processes such as quality and efficiency—have significant impact on protecting workers and enhancing company performance and profitability. The four key elements are:

- *Management leadership and employee engagement.* This is about enhancing a safety culture that creates the opportunity for safety excellence through shared ownership and responsibility.
- *Safety management systems.* This is a framework of processes and procedures used to ensure that an organization can fulfill all safety tasks required to achieve its objectives.
- *Risk reduction strategies.* Risk is the combination of the likelihood of an event (occurrence) and the severity of the injury that may result. Risk is always present in the workplace and companies who strive to reduce risk will outperform companies that do not.
- *Performance measurement.* Managing a process of improvement requires data on activities and outcomes in the form of performance measures. This enables companies to establish baselines, measure improvement over baseline, and understand the relationship (correlation) between safety activities and the outcomes of injury and disability.

These four key elements are represented as a journey in the following graphic:

Tools for the Journey to Safety Excellence



IMPO: What types of specific safety concerns are most prevalent for manufacturers? What do you think are typically a manufacturer's biggest safety problems?

JJ: According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, over 50 percent of nonfatal workplace injuries result from overexertion, falls on same level, and struck by incidents. 35 percent of workplace deaths are the result of motor vehicle incidents, followed by 11 percent for falls from heights (to lower level). For manufacturing, the rate of deaths and nonfatal injuries went down from 2007 to 2008 (most recent years that data is available).

IMPO: Besides the human/health element of safety violations, what types of costs are associated with lost time accidents? Do most manufacturers realize how much small infractions could cost over time?

JJ: The greatest cost of all is the human suffering that results from workplace injuries. In addition to impacting the individual's health and well being, there is also an emotional and economic burden borne by the company, coworkers and the injured worker's family. The typical measure of cost is workers compensation, which is payment for medical, wage replacement, and administrative expenses. What is more difficult to measure is the indirect cost associated with the consequences of an injury event that includes interruption of a production process, response to care for the injured worker, supervisor time to investigate the incident, possible damage to equipment or product, and a myriad number of other interruptions and expenses. These indirect costs are estimated to be many multiples of the direct or insurable

costs (worker's compensation), and it is likely that many companies do not have a true appreciation for the full economic burden of workplace incidents.

IMPO: Manufacturers tend to have problems keeping safety “top of mind” with their employees. How do you suggest they troubleshoot this?

JJ: If safety is not “top of mind” with the employees, it is because safety is not “top of mind” with the company’s executives and managers. If management sets the expectation that safety is to be integrated as a vital part of business operations, provides the resources to support that objective, and remains actively engaged, then employees will be equally engaged keeping safety “top of mind.” One approach management can take to better engage employees is to recognize that the people that do the work know the most about the risks that they face in doing their jobs. If management respects the employee’s knowledge of risk inherent in their work tasks, and then engages them in a process of understanding that risk and finding means to reduce it, employees will not only treat safety as an operational priority, they will also contribute in a meaningful way to the journey to safety excellence.

IMPO: What other types of initiatives does NSC offer for manufacturers?

JJ: The NSC continues to invest in creating tools and resources in three critical areas. The strategic areas of focus to help companies in their improvement efforts are:

1. Determining where you are and where you need to go (set baseline, determine gaps, set plans for improvement).
 - Safety Management System assessments to determine if the right things are getting done in a timely, consistent, quality manner.
 - Employee perception surveys to give voice to workers and learn how they experience safety and management’s role in leadership. In other words, are the right things getting done the right way?
2. Developing capabilities to support the improvement process (knowledge and skill transfer).
 - Blended opportunities for learning in classrooms, onsite, and online.
 - Center of Excellence for sharing effective practices based on research and data.
3. Managing the improvement process (software solution).
 - System guides business process for safety and manages improvement.
 - Data is captured for benchmarking and performance measurement.

Join the National Safety Council in San Diego, October 3-8, for NSC 2010 Congress & Expo. See how the Journey to Safety Excellence philosophy of continuous improvement helps safety managers reach benchmarks they never thought possible. Learn more at www.congress.nsc.org [1].

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[1] <http://www.congress.nsc.org/>