

Leadership Formula:

Trust + Credibility x Competence = Results

*A guide to safety excellence through organizational, and
personal transformation*

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SAFETY LEADERSHIP is both simple and complex. A leader's role is to set direction (what level of safety excellence do we want?); convince others to go in that direction; and inspire people to achieve the vision.

These principles are simple, common sense concepts. Yet, as anyone who has struggled to change the mindset of people accustomed to taking risks can attest, they are difficult to achieve. Why? Because we are forced to deal with people's emotions, reactions and resistance to change.

Furthermore, I have found that this type of fundamental change is not possible unless people believe that the leader cares and is sincere. In this real-life example, I consulted with a plant manager who was moved to the point of tears as he talked about how important the safety of his employees were to him because his closest friend died in a mining accident. Yet, employees say he is the biggest detriment to safety. They fear him and are at the point of going on strike.

While his intentions are to save lives and prevent injuries, this manager is perceived as vindictive, uncaring and self-serving. How is this possible? It is because he is unaware of the effects of his actions or the messages they communicate. He never walks through the worksite. He does not know people's names or their families. When I asked people what this person had done to make them mistrust him, they stated, "We simply do not know him."

He is dealing with people who have diverse needs, desires, motivations, fears, cultural backgrounds and experiences. Thus, he cannot successfully lead without becoming aware of how his actions are perceived by others and talking with people face to face so that they can get to know him and his intentions. He learned the

hard way that you can have the best programs in place, but if people do not believe that the leader cares and is sincere, the programs will not be supported.

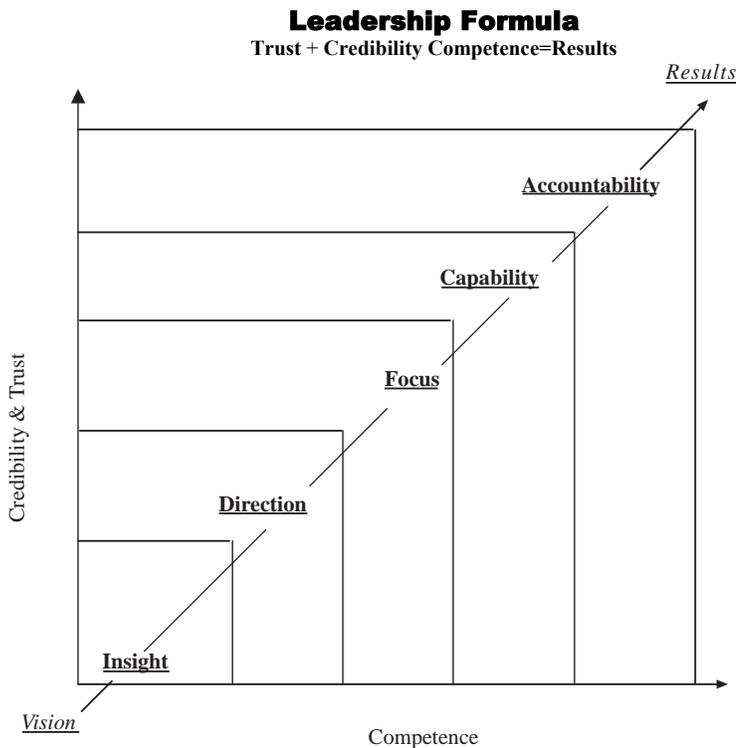
Safety performance is 90 percent about people—this is what makes leading both simple and complex. The leadership model presented here is based on the extensive research of authors who have spent their careers studying successful leaders and their ability to create change that gets results. In addition it is based on factual case histories of leaders who used these concepts to turn unsafe, negative environments into positive, successful enterprises with excellent safety records. These people applied the leadership formula. They developed both personal trust and credibility while creating competencies for excellence in their organizations.

**Trust + Credibility x
Organizational
Development = Results**

The three-dimensional model for safety leadership that is shown in Figure 1 is based on the concept that people move from vision to implementation via three dimensions that operate simultaneously:

- 1) Gaining personal trust and credibility;
- 2) Developing organizational competence
- 3) A five-step leadership pathway—insight, direction, capability, focus and accountability—actions that guide us to successfully develop trust, credibility and an organization capable of safety excellence.

Figure 1



First Dimension: Trust & Credibility

Based on interviews with more than 200 plant sites, lack of trust and credibility between labor and management is the most-frequent obstacle to improving cultures (Carrillo 1999). The following story is a case in point.

An intense effort to raise safety awareness was undertaken at a chemical plant. Unfortunately, senior management was not very involved and left the effort to the safety professionals and a team of volunteer researchers.

Within a year a chemist was burned over 40% of his body when he mishandled a chemical spill. The management group gathered the employees to give an update. They briefly mentioned the employee's condition and spent most of the time talking about equipment damage and the importance of reaching full production as quickly as possible. Soon the rumor mill began criticizing management for not caring. Production levels dropped.

Upon further investigation, I discovered the lab manager had visited the patient every day and remained in very close contact with the family. He was very upset by the accident, but could not express it. Critical incidents like the employee meeting can build or destroy trust with the public and employees.

In responding to safety concerns or injuries a manager must think several times before responding in a way that seems uncaring or unresponsive. This is the fastest way to lose trust and once it is lost, it is very difficult to re-build.

Once mistrust is in place it trying to break it reminds us of the Greek myth of Sisyphus. We are told the gods punished him by forcing him to roll a boulder up a mountain only to have it roll back down each evening. Many of our safety efforts turn fruitless when we try to implement them in an atmosphere of mistrust.

Trust is recoverable, however. In the myth, Sisyphus comes to accept his ordeal and learns to take pride in his accomplishments of the moment. Breaking through the cycle of mistrust requires a similar attitude from management; it only through keeping commitments and repeatedly producing results despite apparent setbacks that leader eventually wins over his/her followers.

Second Dimension: Developing the Competencies for Safety Excellence

So, the first dimension of successful leadership is creating personal trust and credibility. The second focuses on developing the organization's capability to succeed. This entails developing people and creating the processes, structures and skills to support safety excellence.

One of the most successful safety leaders I know is Tom Moeller. Tom has been plant manager of several Exxon-Mobil refineries. With the help of a dedicated group of union leaders, he took one of the toughest refineries from lowest in safety and production to best in the division.

From Tom's perspective turning the refinery safety around is a step-by-step process. "There was a list of grievances around safety several inches thick. We resolved every one of them, made the repairs and improvements people wanted to see. We instituted extensive training and set up employee teams to handle important issues like preventative maintenance, crane inspections, etc. We spent a fair amount of money. The other side of the coin is our heavy equipment reliability is way up. Big pieces of equipment might cost a million or half a million dollars, so you don't want them out of service much of the time or you will have to replace them by renting apiece of equipment. There aren't any injures. While we spend a lot of money to train people, the workers now have responsibility for it. They spend money for the appropriate repairs. I think we probably made it back several times over."

Tom's story provides a concrete example of the types of leadership activities it takes to develop the 2nd dimension, competence in the people and systems.

Third Dimension: From Vision to Excellence

The third dimension of the model is a five-step leadership pathway to turn vision into actions to reach excellence. Together, these steps form the core capabilities to fundamentally change the way people think. Figure 2 illustrates examples of specific actions for each of the five steps.

1) Insight: the ability to see the ways people (self and others) contribute to the problem.

2) Direction: the ability to aspire and inspire.

3) Capability: seeing the organization as a system and being willing to acquire a profound understanding of the problems.

4) Focus: single-mindedness and perseverance.

5) Accountability: having mental models to give and get commitments.

The actions on the left side of the five-step dimension build personal credibility and trust, while the actions to the right develop an organization's ability to perform at the desired safety level.

Five-Step Leadership Pathway Actions Step One: Insight

Leaders need to assess their personal as well as their organizational strengths and weaknesses to gain insight into the issues that must be addressed in order to reach excellence. If a leader does not know how his/her actions are impacting people, how will s/he know what to change to make things better?

Ask someone you respect to tell you how your actions and words are being interpreted by others. Remember the lab manager in my previous story. He was very concerned about the employee who got hurt, but talked about the equipment damage instead. How would it help him to know the impact of his actions?

The ability to question one's own role in keeping things the way they are is critical to leadership success. When things are not going as desired, it is easy to blame others and, thus, claim no control over the results. By looking instead at personal shortcomings, lack of leadership skill or inability to see obstacles that must be removed, a person can act on things s/he is able to control and improvement will be evident.

Step Two: Direction

Setting direction and inspiring others comes in many forms: vision, strategy, goals, vision, action, planning and example-setting. The visions and goals, of successful leaders have certain similar characteristics:

1) They are shared and meaningful.

2) They are big.

3) They do not focus on numbers but engage People's hearts and minds.

The first step is for a leader to create his/her own vision and mission. The second is to get others to participate in creating one for the organization. Discussions about vision statements are so frequent that these statements may seem hackneyed. But a survey of over 4000 top ranking managers listed a clear personal vision of the future as the most important quality in creating excellence in an organization.

The most frequent comment I get in my leadership workshops is, "Thank you for providing me with an opportunity to focus on what I prefer to have happen. I now realize that the strength of my vision is a powerful tool to accomplish what I want to get done."

Take time to write half a page that describes your ideal organization. How are people working? What do your relationships look like? What is your safety record? Who is working with you to make it happen?

Step Three: Focus

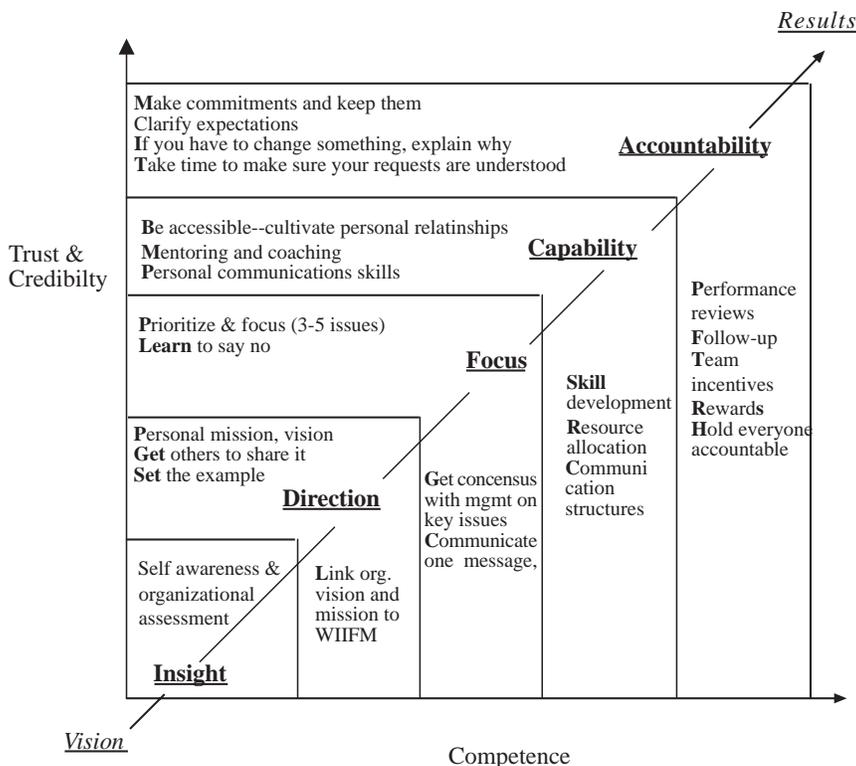
Edgar Schein, a leading author on the topic of organizational culture and leadership, states that one of the most powerful mechanisms leaders use to create and reinforce culture is what they pay attention to, measure and control (Schein 1985). Paying attention can mean anything from noticing or commenting on something to systematically rewarding or measuring specific results. Paying attention is especially powerful when it is focused on a few important priorities and the leader sets the example.

It is not enough to say, "Safety is our first priority." When conflicting priorities arise, leaders put safety first in their actions. It is not enough to say, "Everyone has the right to shut down an unsafe job." When someone shuts down a job or requests to shut it down, there must not be negative repercussions or second-guessing.

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Figure 2: Five Step Leadership Pathway



Step Four: Capability Development

Most companies are willing to spend money for safety, but few will spend adequate time. Leaders must be willing to be accessible to people to give their ideas and input. They need to schedule events and meetings to articulate the vision and make necessary plans to reach goals. If a manager tells employees a safety discussion meeting is important, yet only shows up for the kick-off, s/he immediately sends a message that safety is not a priority. Likewise, leaders need to allocate organizational resources such as building competencies through training, shaping teams, reengineering work processes to include safety and building communications networks.

Step Five: Accountability

It is interesting that many people in the workforce identify lack of accountability as a barrier to effectiveness (CCC 1999). Although many people identify accountability as a problem, conversations with managers and employees reveal their unwillingness or discomfort with holding people accountable. Employees feel it is management's job to hold peers accountable. "I'd probably get a black eye if I went up to someone and criticized them in any way. It's time for a new look at the concept of accountability.

The first order of accountability is to hold oneself accountable, the second is to hold others accountable. A leader is responsible for maintaining a performance management system that makes expectations clear, in which everyone understands how and when they will be held accountable, and to which everyone agrees.

Effective standards and expectations are arrived at by mutual agreement, but once they are set, how can managers support the behavior change required to bring these new expectations to fruition?

I have interviewed successful people who have proven track records where they have taken high accident work areas and turned them into low or no accident areas and they have shared with me how they hold themselves and others accountable. These are the actions they have in common:

- 1) Speak individually with each person about the standards for safety and expectations;
- 2) Ask them if they have any suggestions to improve safety, quality or productivity;
- 3) Note all suggestions;
- 4) Inform individuals of suggestions you have implemented. If you have not been able to do it, explain why;
- 5) Do this continually throughout the year.

If each of your supervisors and managers did these things on a regular basis, you would drastically reduce your accidents and improve all aspects of the way work is done.

The notion of asking people for ideas and implementing them is the highest form of recognition and respect. These form the basis of the trust and open communication so important to a successful enterprise as well as safety excellence.

Conclusion

The five steps on the leadership pathway are insight, direction, capability, focus and accountability. Completing each step helps to create trust and credibility as well as to convert vision into reality at both the personal and organizational level.

The model described here is based on the path safety leaders have provided as an example for others to follow. It is not the only way, and these leaders would be the first to say that the concepts are constant but the specifics are ever changing. Success with this formula that relies on:

- Trust as a way of doing business;
- Fundamental belief that people do not want to get hurt;
- Willingness to keep going despite many setbacks;
- Listening and responding to people's ideas and concerns;
- Everyone holding themselves and each other accountable;
- Safety as an ongoing process.

You can make a difference as an individual by following this path, inspiring others with your vision and remembering that all that is required of you is to never, never, never give up.