

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP:



The Key to World-Class Safety

BY DR. RICHARD D. FULWILER

There is no finite description of what entails world-class safety, but there is one characteristic that absolutely is essential, and that is the engagement of the work force in the safety process. Transformation leadership is the key to engagement.

Since retiring as director of health and safety worldwide for Procter & Gamble, I have had the privilege of working with a number of companies dedicated to achieving EHS excellence, a.k.a. world-class safety (WCS).

Safety professionals know that employees do not become engaged by decree or by promotional gimmicks like flashlights and blankets. But do safety professionals know how to achieve employee engagement, and if so, what are they doing about it? The key to engagement is not the safety professional, it is the organizational leaders who must become less transactional and more transformational. So the question now becomes, what can safety professionals do to convince leadership of the need to become more transformational?

Transformation leadership not only will drive better safety results but also better business results, because the workers are totally engaged not

only in safety, but in the entire work process. This could be the key selling point for leadership to become more transformational.

This article will provide safety professionals with something they can share with their leadership as a start to increasing the transformation leadership of the entire organization. A key selling point is the fact that an organization where leaders develop transformational leadership skills not only will excel at safety, but also at other critical business outputs. No smoke and mirrors – hard data demonstrating this is included in this article.

Atlas Holdings LLC accurately captures the importance of engagement in their safety principles: "We believe companies with WCS performance will achieve business success through engagement and empowerment of employees." However, this is no chicken-and-egg story. Engagement clearly precedes world-class safety and outstanding business success.

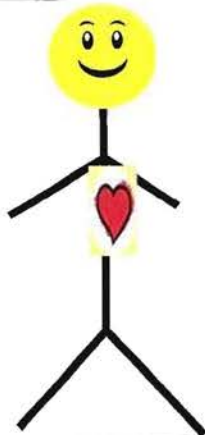
WORK SYSTEMS

When I joined P&G several years ago, there was a strong initiative to move from a traditional work system to a high-performance work system (HPWS), also known as an empowered or self-directed work system. Peter Drucker, a widely revered and respected author and management consultant, was a leader in this movement. In one of his early books he stated, "The attainment of the quality (of work life) increasingly will have to be considered a business opportunity and will have to be converted by management into profitable business." *USA Today* had a write-up on Drucker shortly after he passed away and this quote sets the stage for employee engagement and the role transformational leadership plays: "His concepts turned companies away from treating employees simply as cogs (in a wheel), persuading management to think of workers as assets

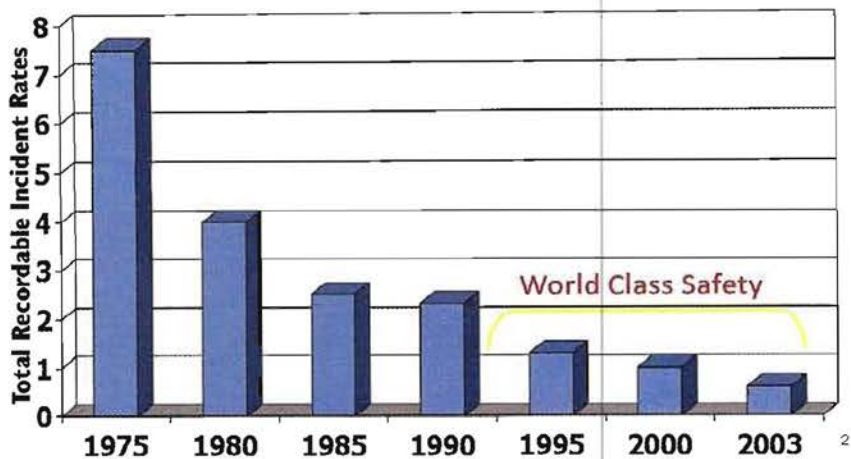
**FIGURE 1:
Traditional Work System**



**Figure 2:
HPWS World Class**



**FIGURE 3:
The P&G Journey to World-Class Safety**



and partners – which is how the best companies behave today."

Figure 1 describes a traditional work system where workers are utilized from the shoulders down, i.e. the brawn and their work is task-focused vs. process-focused. This work system will drive average results for production, quality, cost or safety. These work systems are highly transactional, featuring a *quid pro quo* relationship between management and the workers.

Figure 2 describes a HPWS where the worker is fully engaged in the work process. The worker is utilized from the head down, i.e. both the brains and the brawn. In many cases, the worker's heart also is invested in the work process. Only under these conditions can the relationship between the worker and the work be optimized and maximized. It may be a cliché, but when the "hearts and minds" are engaged, above-average results will be achieved.

As you will see, the HPWS requires managers to focus both on the work and the worker, which is what transformation leadership is all about. Several years ago, the terms transactional leadership (TAL) and transformational leadership (TFL) did not exist. The management model in vogue in those days was the Blake-Mouton grid, where a traditional work system was managed by a 9:1 manager with nine being the primary focus on the work and one being the minimal focus on the workers. The HPWS requires managers to have a balanced approach, which on the grid was labeled as a 9:9 – equal weighting on both the work

and the worker. Today a 9:1 manager is a TAL and a 9:9 manager as TFL. The bottom line being that a HPWS led by TFL will deliver above average results across the line – production, cost, quality, safety, etc.

Transitioning from a traditional work system to a HPWS is no easy task. In fact, there were a number of false starts at P&G. One of the key success factors in the transition was leading with safety. In other words, engaging the worker in the safety process first and following with the other critical work processes. This might seem intuitively obvious today, but it certainly was not years ago. **Figure 3** describes the P&G journey to WCS as reflected by the OSHA Total Recordable Incident Rate over time. To put this in perspective, in 1980 the industry average was 8.7 versus P&G's 4.0.

TAL/TFL 101: The fundamental difference between TAL and TFL is that TAL is primarily focused on the work and TFL is focused on both the work and the worker.

A transactional leader:

- Has a *quid pro quo* relationship with the worker, frequently relying on disciplinary action.
- Is task-oriented and focused on regulatory compliance.
- Preserves existing culture, conditions and practices.
- Is likely to focus more on the work than the worker.

Meanwhile, a transformational leader:

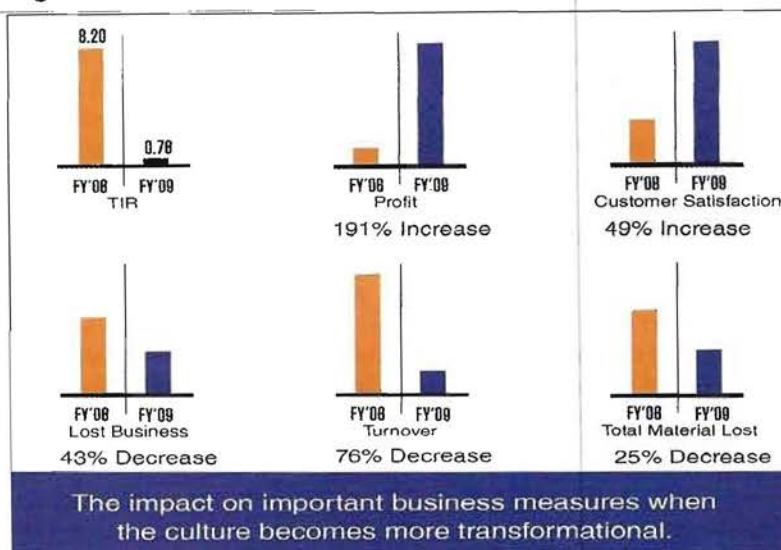
- Prompts results in which the workers' values align with the leaders' values.

- Empowers the worker to engage in the work process, going beyond their self interest.
- Personally is engaged with the worker and cares about the worker.
- Maximizes the contribution of the worker.
- Focuses on both the work and the worker.

Most leaders came with TAL as standard equipment and need to add TFL as a critical option. This quote from a Cintas senior vice president to his management team communicates in no uncertain terms where the focus needs to be: "Our focus cannot and will not be on our injury statistics e.g. or the cost of unsafety. The focus of our effort and our passion must be on protecting our employees, period! Our goal should be that no employee ever gets hurt. It's that personal to me; make it personal to you and not about achieving a number."

In his book, *Heroic Leadership*, Chris Lowney summarizes the outcome from TFL: "Individuals perform best when they are respected, valued and trusted by someone who genuinely cares for

Figure 4: FY '06 – '09



their well-being." That "someone" needs to be a transformational leader.

The proof is in the pudding: I've had the privilege of working with Cintas, a company that is committed to achieving world-class safety. Through 2006, Cintas leadership's focus was heavily transactional. After 2006, the leadership focus was heavily transforma-

tional. Note not just the dramatic improvement in safety results but also in other critical business outputs.

I asked the general manager, who took over in 2006, what he did to create this tremendous transformational change in the organization. "Our vision was to create a culture of caring," he answered. "I personally marketed, commu-

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nicated, demonstrated and taught this message from [the] moment I began serving the partners [employees] of Portsmouth." Note his emphasis on his role in serving the employees.

Tom Krause does a very good job of describing the characteristics of transformation leadership as well as TFL best practices in his book, *Leading with Safety* (Wiley Interscience). A simplified description of the characteristics and attributes of TFL are:

Listening and Communicating –

Listening is one of the most important communication skills there is, yet most of us have had little or no formal training in listening. There is a distinct difference between "hearing" and "listening." Hearing is fairly passive with little or no energy expended and can be accomplished by using only our ears. Listening is highly active, requiring us to use not only our ears but our head, heart, eyes and body. Covey's fifth habit in his book, *The 7 Habits for Highly Effective People*, is, "Seek first to understand and then to be understood." A transformational leader shows a willingness to understand just where the workers are

on any given subject.

Some important characteristics of a good listener are seeking first to understand, then to be understood; listening for meaning and feeling and not just for facts; demonstrating a high level of caring; not interrupting or developing a response while the person is speaking; and being open to the speaker in a way that it shows.

Alternate ways for senior management to listen are by creating "huddles;" sitting down with small groups and asking them how they feel about safety. The critical factor here is the ability of the leader to be able to communicate effectively with the workers on the shop floor. You will see this is a common theme in all of the remaining characteristics.

Caring – Caring only can occur when the focus is both on the work and the worker. Transactional leaders obviously care that the work gets done, whereas a transformational leader also cares about the worker. Caring leaders are interested and sensitive to the needs of others and visibly demonstrate they care about the health and safety of

employees. They are willing to interact with all levels of an organization.

The CBS TV show *Undercover Boss* portrays just how little senior management knows about what goes into the actual job. Once they experience what it is like to work as an employee, they really start caring about their workers.

Collegiality – This characteristic presents a good time to mention that transformational leaders will most likely not have all of the skills described under these five critical characteristics. The key is to recognize just what characteristics make up a TFL and leverage those that best fit a specific leader's make up. Some elements describing collegiality are:

- Showing gratitude, sympathy or empathy at all levels.
- Mixing with all levels in a friendly manner.
- Being able to relate to all levels and make them feel at ease.
- Being able to coach and support subordinates.
- Being comfortable speaking in front of small or large groups.

Engaging – The whole thrust of


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transformational leadership is achieving the engagement of the entire work force. This is key to achieving world-class safety. TFLs demonstrate a personal connection with workers and communicate with them in a caring and friendly manner. Their goal is to help workers achieve the desired result, while conveying to workers that they are more than just cogs in the wheel. They also have the ability to link the workers' needs with the company's mission.

The ability to link the workers' needs with the company's mission is the capstone. How can this possibly be accomplished under the traditional work system? Capturing the hearts and minds of workers is the essential element in maximizing/optimizing the contributions of the workers.

SELF ASSESSMENT

Suggest your corporate leaders complete a brief self assessment to establish a benchmark for continuously improvement in becoming more transformational. The assessment tool on the right (Figure 5) is by no means exhaustive, but is a good starting point.

Begin by rating yourself based on interacting with all levels including the "shop floor." You can be brutally honest; there's no need to share results. Use the first rating that comes to mind, with 1 = lowest skill level and 10 = highest. Total each rating and divide by 5.

Here is a simplistic guide to determine where you fall on the transformational scale:

0-2: Significant opportunity for improvement.

3-5: Good start but still room for improvement.

6-7: You get this transformational stuff and it makes sense.

8+: You're transformational. Now put it to use and share with others.

Someone committed to growing their TFL skills should take the assessment periodically to measure their progress. A 360-degree assessment would include asking bosses, peers and subordinates to conduct the assessment for a given manager.

Transformational leadership is a powerful skill set that optimizes and maximizes the contributions of workers across all important business areas,

FIGURE 5: TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT

Instructions: Read the characteristics and rate yourself as it relates to your interaction with all levels in your organization including front line partners. This is confidential and for your use only. Be brutally honest in assessing your rating. Provide only one rating for each of the five characteristics. Add each of the 5 ratings and divide by 5 for your overall rating.

CHARACTERISTIC DESCRIPTION	RATING: Rate 1 – through 10 with 1 being the lowest skill level and 10 being the highest
Listening: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Seeks first to understand and then to be understood. ■ Listens for meaning and feelings and not just for facts. ■ Demonstrates a high level of caring. ■ Does not develop a response or rebuttal while a person is speaking. ■ Is open to the speaker in a way that it shows. 	
Communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Writes and speaks in language workers can understand. ■ Takes time to talk with workers about safety on facility tours. ■ Starts meetings with safety to communicate its importance. ■ Gets assurance that safety messages clearly are communicated up and down the line. ■ Demonstrates openness to input, feedback and even criticism from subordinates. 	
Caring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Is interested in and sensitive to the needs of others. ■ Demonstrates in a visible way they care about the health and well being of everyone in the organization. ■ Is willing to interact with all levels in the organization. ■ Greets workers with a warm welcome. 	
Collegial: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Shows gratitude, sympathy or empathy to all levels. ■ Mixes with all levels of the organization in a friendly manner. ■ Is able to relate to all levels and make them feel at ease. ■ Is able to get along with and coach and support others. ■ Is comfortable speaking in front of small and large groups. 	
Engaging: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Demonstrates a personal connection with subordinates. ■ Communicates directly with subordinates in a caring and friendly manner. ■ Helps subordinates to commit to the desired result. ■ Conveys a sense of worth to the subordinates. ■ Links the worker's needs with the organization's mission. 	
Total the five individual ratings	
Divide by 5 for your Transformational Leadership Rating	

including safety. Even so, this important fact has not been well articulated or applied by safety professionals as a means to achieving world-class safety in their organizations.

EHS

Prior to forming Technology Leadership Associates, Dr. Richard Fulwiler had a 28-year career in health and safety at Procter & Gamble, starting as an industrial hygienist and progressing to director of health and safety worldwide. His responsibilities included occupational medicine, industrial hygiene, safety, OSHA and workers' compensation. During his tenure, Procter & Gamble achieved broad recognition for its health and safety excellence as well as for having developed and deployed a compre-

hensive behavior-based management system spanning the entire globe leading to world-class results. Fulwiler has a B.S. in chemistry, an M.S. in industrial health, an Sc.D. in environmental health and is a certified industrial hygienist and a certified safety and health manager. He is past president of the American Academy of Industrial Hygiene, and currently is adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine and on the faculty of the Harvard School of Public Health and director for their Leadership and Management Course.

