

Win a *competitive edge* with compliance



Some companies adopt sustainability and health, safety and environment (HSE) management for compliance purposes. Others see this as a way in which they can qualify to compete. The most enlightened companies see a strong sustainability and HSE culture as a true competitive advantage. Which type of company is yours? Vince Asdagi reports.

Consider the demise of Enron as a consequence of questionable financial practices, or the impact of the tragic explosion at the Texas City refinery on the reputation of BP and its former leader. Clearly, the world is changing rapidly in response to many factors, including the growing expectations of society for business and government to do better.

Few companies operate in the belief that values including a focus on safety and health, environmental stewardship, ethical behaviour and respect for people will enable their business to grow faster, deliver more value and achieve greater profitability. But sustainable growth shouldn't just be a corporate mission; fortunately it is increasingly seen as an imperative for success in the 21st century.

Where to start?

A strong position with respect to sustainability must start somewhere.

The most appropriate and perhaps most effective starting point for a sustainability focused culture is through excellence in workplace safety. Design, implementation and execution of a robust safety management system can build the leadership characteristics, management processes and operational discipline necessary not only to reduce and eliminate incidents, but also to engage the workforce to solve complex problems tied to a company's sustainability.

Of course, there are challenges to achieving this vision. Achievement of true safety excellence is not a short term endeavour. To sustain safety excellence, a company culture requires staying power and clarity of purpose. Yet, these are the same challenges that all businesses face to execute their core operations — informed leadership, effective and self-renewing business processes, an engaged workforce and just and fair performance management capability. Companies that can overcome complacency and short-term diversions to achieve excellence in safety have the making of what is needed to achieve overall business sustainability.

People hold the keys

The key to driving safety and by proxy sustainability is through people and while there are many business themes, like production cost or quality, on which one might build a culture of operating discipline, safety is the best.

Creating a culture of excellence is not easy and requires persistence and skill. A strong focus on leadership, engaging the workforce and building trust are crucial. In short, the key three elements are: the leadership must be flexible, informed and visible; having strong and appropriate management systems are important, but a primary focus on your people will build trust and provide a learning foundation for improved performance; when you think about tools and rules, be practical rather than theoretical (keep it simple).

Lead the way

DuPont are leaders in the field of sustainable business safety. Through its own operations and consultancy with other companies, it has been discovered that leadership is the key. Leadership is easy to say. It is much harder to sustain with consistency, and in a way that is genuine and felt by everyone. Former head of

The DuPont's HE Excellence Centre Paul Tebo was a member of the Baker Panel that looked into BP's Texas City disaster. Dr Tebo believes BP lacked the visible leadership necessary to sustain a culture that would have the discipline to manage process safety effectively. While BP had done well in recent years with more routine aspects of workplace safety, there clearly were issues with the safety culture at Texas City.

There's no doubt that process safety is a tough problem. It requires a well-defined, complete and robust management system — and the discipline to keep it going despite the fact that truly high consequence events occur infrequently. One can look to technology to solve this challenge but leadership is essential to sustain the necessary discipline.

Finding practical solutions

Some companies focus entirely on finding a better or more sophisticated tool, system, process or engineering solution. This

approach may yield short-term benefits, but will not yield HSE excellence in the long run. The ability to engage people and technology in the right balance is the key to how we leverage HSE management into our thinking about sustainability.

Heads of leading companies are figuring out they can ride this wave for many years to come. But, they can only do it successfully if they and their workforce are fully emotionally committed, if they can use strong operating discipline to make the hard decisions and trade-offs, engage each other, and find real practical solutions to their most pressing issues.

When thinking about sustainability, HSE, operating discipline, and the wholesale engagement of staff, where does your company stand? And more importantly, where do you personally stand?

** Vince Asdagi is the Australia and New Zealand business director of DuPont Safety Resources.*

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