Lessons from the Ashes:
The Critical Role of Safety Leadership

Robert Sumwalt
September 22, 2016
Accidents Involve Many Factors

- Errors by Individuals
- Organizational Factors
“... the flight crewmembers’ failure to ... identify the airplane’s location on the airport surface during taxi and their failure to cross-check and verify that the airplane was on the correct runway before takeoff.”
“The Metrolink engineer was aware that he was violating company safety rules when he used his cell phone to make calls or to send and receive text messages while on duty, but he continued the practice nonetheless.”
“The captain’s failure to effectively manage the flight ...”
“the truck driver’s failure to maintain control of the truck-tractor combination vehicle because he was distracted by use of his cellular telephone.”
Accidents Involve Many Factors

Errors by Individuals

Organizational Factors
“WMATA’s lack of a safety culture…”

“Ineffective oversight by WMATA Board of Directors”
“Contributing to the accident was an organizational culture that prioritized mission execution over aviation safety...”
“Contributing was the lack of oversight by the Jefferson and Orange County Board of Pilot Commissioners.”
“The deficiencies identified during this investigation are indicative of an organizational accident.”

“The multiple recurring deficiencies in PG&E operational practices indicate a systemic problem.”
“Sky Express, Inc., management failed to follow adequate safety practices and to exercise safety oversight of its drivers.”
Roswell, NM
April 2011
“Gulfstream’s focus on meeting the G650’s planned certification date caused schedule-related pressure that was not adequately counterbalanced by robust organizational processes to prevent, identify, and correct the company’s key engineering oversight errors.”
Gulfstream Managers Blamed for Fatal Crash on Test Flight

by Alex Leof

October 11, 2012 — 12:55 AM EDT

Pressure to speed flight tests of a new model of General Dynamics Corp.'s Gulfstream business jet so it could win U.S. certification for sale was blamed by a U.S. safety agency for crash that killed four employees.

The National Transportation Safety Board yesterday ruled that Gulfstream management was responsible for the accident that sent a G650, which costs $65 million and has the longest range of any private aircraft, sliding off a Roswell, New Mexico, runway in flames on April 15, 2011.
Could this be you?

Your Company’s Management Blamed for Fatal Accident

Your company sued for millions. Company declares bankruptcy, ceases operations.
“The best way to predict the future is to create it.”

- Peter Drucker
Creating a Future of Safety: Three Leadership Questions

1. How strong is our safety culture?
2. Are we really living our values?
3. Are we fooling ourselves?
Creating a Future of Safety

HOW STRONG IS OUR SAFETY CULTURE?
Washington, DC
June 2009

“WMATA’s lack of a safety culture…”
Safety culture is the core values and behaviors resulting from a collective commitment by leaders and individuals to emphasize safety over competing goals to ensure protection of people and the environment.

Source: U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Do you have a good safety culture?
Do you have a good safety culture?

• “… it is worth pointing out that if you are convinced that your organization has a good safety culture, you are almost certainly mistaken.”

• “… a safety culture is something that is striven for but rarely attained…”

• “… the process is more important than the product.”

  - James Reason, “Managing the Risks of Organizational Accidents.”
Safety culture starts at the top of the organization and permeates the entire organization.
Sometimes the Message gets Distorted

MOST IMPORTANT – Output!!!!

Get job done at all costs
Fear of retribution
Work sucks
Call in sick for extra vacation day

Cut corners to save money
Unfair discipline

Safety
Quality
Timeliness
Efficiency
Honesty & Respect

Managers
Supervisors
Coworkers
WORD OF THE DAY
Thursday, September 22, 2016

align·ment noun \ə-ˈlīn-ment\

Where the leaders and front line employees, and everyone in between, share and practice the same values.
"The safety behaviors and attitudes of individuals are influenced by their perceptions and expectations about safety in their work environment, and they pattern their safety behaviors to meet demonstrated priorities of organizational leaders, regardless of stated policies."

- Dov Zohar, as cited in NTSB accident report
Metro-North Railroad
Metro North management is committed to workplace safety and participates regularly in safety events.

NTSB questionnaire
n = 156
Management 25
Labor 131
Management does not pressure staff to maintain service or operations, potentially at cost of safety.

- Fully Disagree (-3)
- Mostly Disagree (-2)
- Somewhat Disagree (-1)
- No Opinion (0)
- Somewhat Agree (1)
- Mostly Agree (2)
- Fully Agree (3)

Track Labor: -1.11
Operations Labor: -1.00
Division Management: 0.38
Senior Management: 2.25
Employee Comments

• “Sometimes I feel safety is priority one as long as it's convenient.”
• “Metro-North pays lip service to safety. On time performance & budgets take precedence over safety.”
• “The railroad only cares about the on-time performance.”
• “It’s all about on-time performance and safety rules are thrown out the window to keep on time performance. Management has no clue.”
ARE WE REALLY LIVING OUR VALUES?
Values

• Is safety the top priority of your organization?

• Don’t make it a priority – make it a **core value**.
Living the Values

• In a successful organization, everything you do is run through the filter of your core values to make sure you are being true to them.

• And, most importantly, you must live those values.
SURGEON GENERAL’S WARNING:  
Smoking Causes Lung Cancer,  
Heart Disease, Emphysema, And  
May Complicate Pregnancy.
CVS Stops Tobacco Sales

“The sale of tobacco products is inconsistent with our purpose – helping people on their path to better health.”

- Larry J. Merlo, CEO, CVS Health

This move will cost CVS an estimated $2 BILLION in revenue.
“This move is clearly in-line with their stated purpose and values, a move we don’t see often enough today in corporate America. Relying on a strong foundation of values is often what sets market leaders apart from the pack.”

- Michael Woody, Ph.D. for Fox Business
“Think of values as the core guiding principles that act as the foundation of your organization. These principles should guide every decision and serve as your fallback in times of uncertainty.”

- Michael Woody, Ph.D. for Fox Business
Creating a Future of Safety

ARE WE FOOLING OURSELVES?
An Impressive Operation
An Impressive Operation

• Full time crew
• Impeccable maintenance
• High training standards
• Going above minimum standards
• Positive audit comments
Positive Audit Comments

• “The SMS of this operator is well-developed”
• “Best practices are consistently employed in all facets of the program”
• “Continuous SMS improvement is actively pursued”
• “The Flight Ops Manual is remarkably well-written and comprehensive”
• “Safety culture within the department is shared among all team members”
• “Open reporting of hazards is consistently encouraged by management”
• “Solid safety program, maturing nicely”
“You can fool the auditors, but never fool yourself.”

- John Fenton
And, fool the auditors, they did…

Gulfstream G-IV Crash
Bedford, MA
May 31, 2014
7 Fatalities
And, perhaps they even fooled themselves.
“Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.”

- Will Rogers
“Good can be Bad”

• With good safety performance, people/organizations can easily become complacent.

• Don’t ever believe that a lack of accidents means you are “safe.”

• To counter this complacency, there must be a leadership obsession with continuous improvement.

- Courtesy of Jim Schultz
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