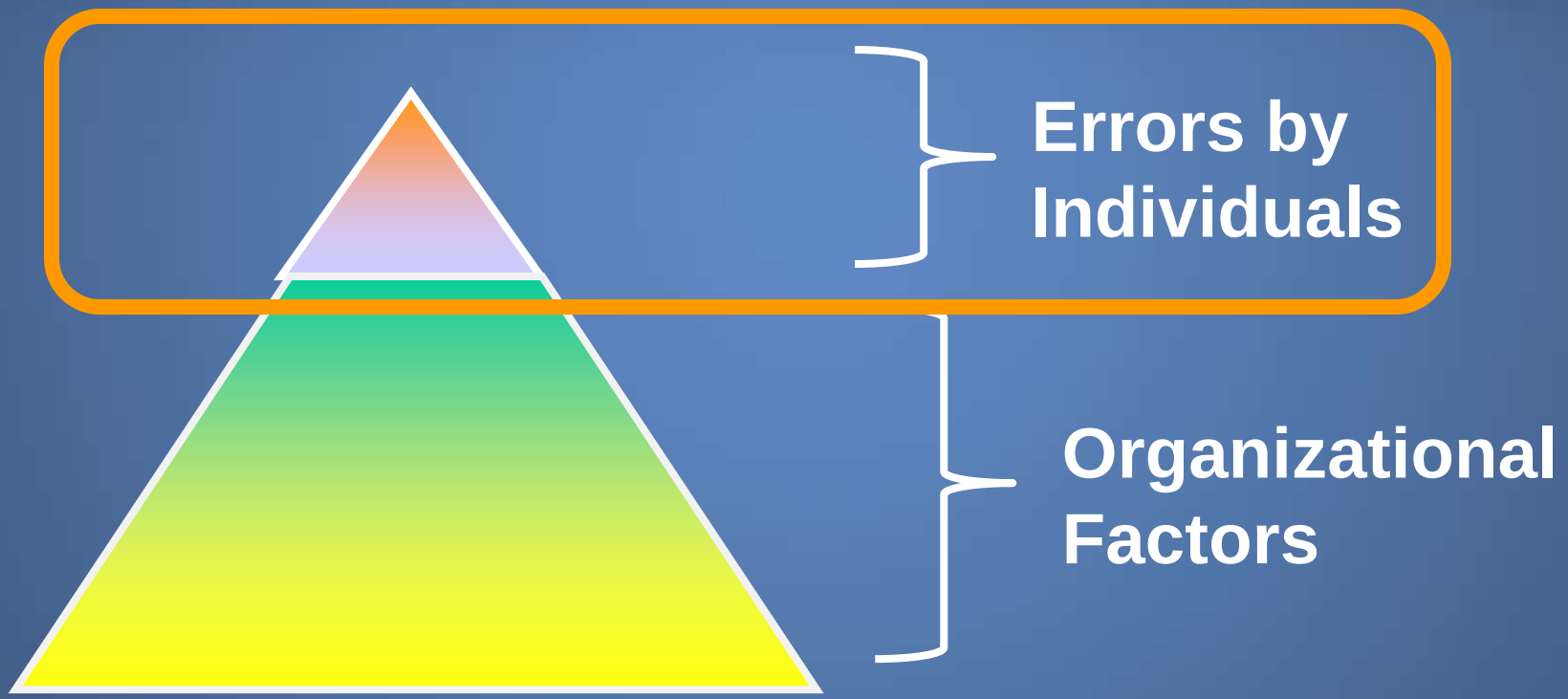
Lessons from the Ashes: The Critical Role of Safety Leadership

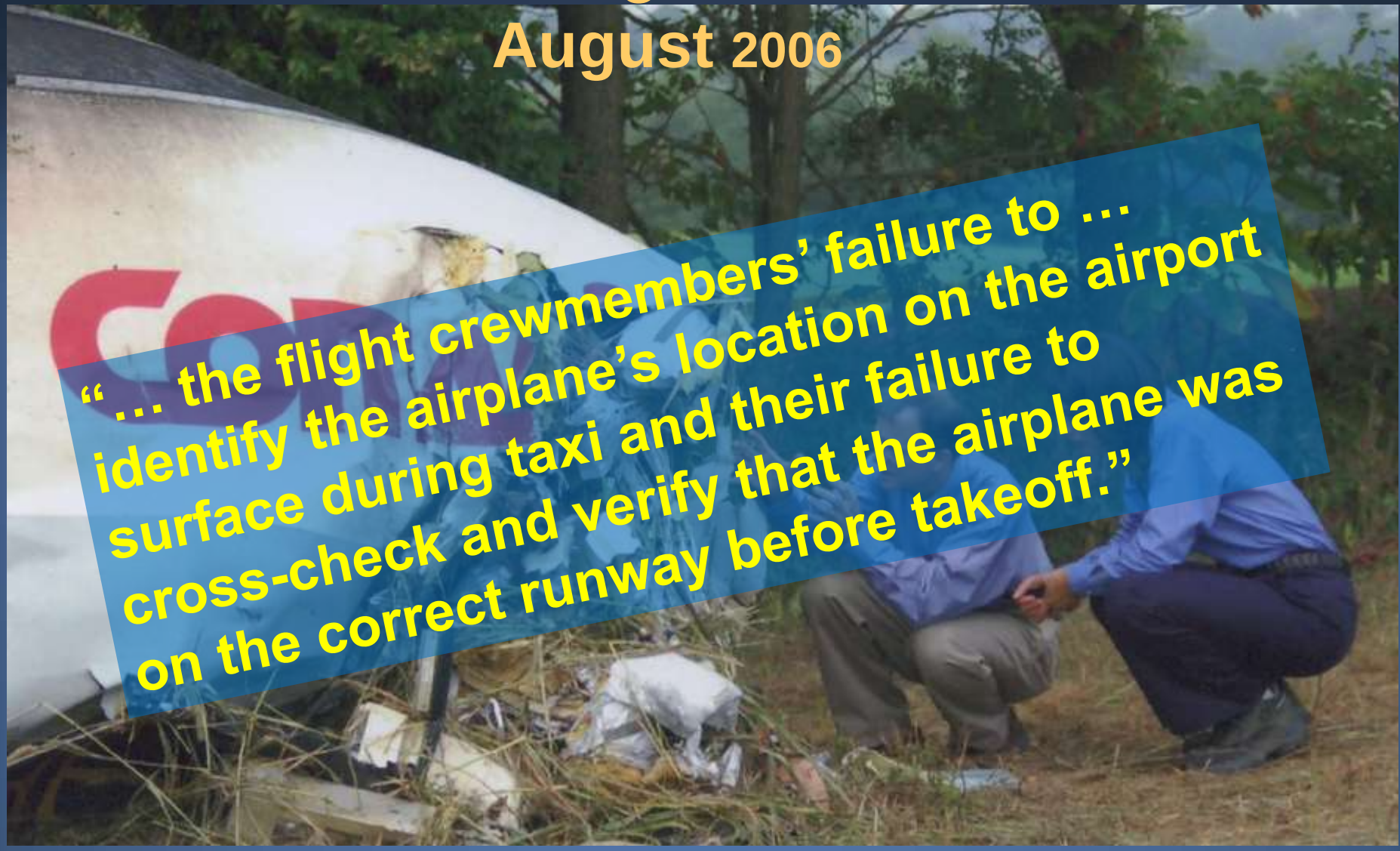
Robert Sumwalt

October 27, 2007

Accidents Involve Many Factors



Lexington, KY
August 2006



Chatsworth, CA. September 2008

"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."

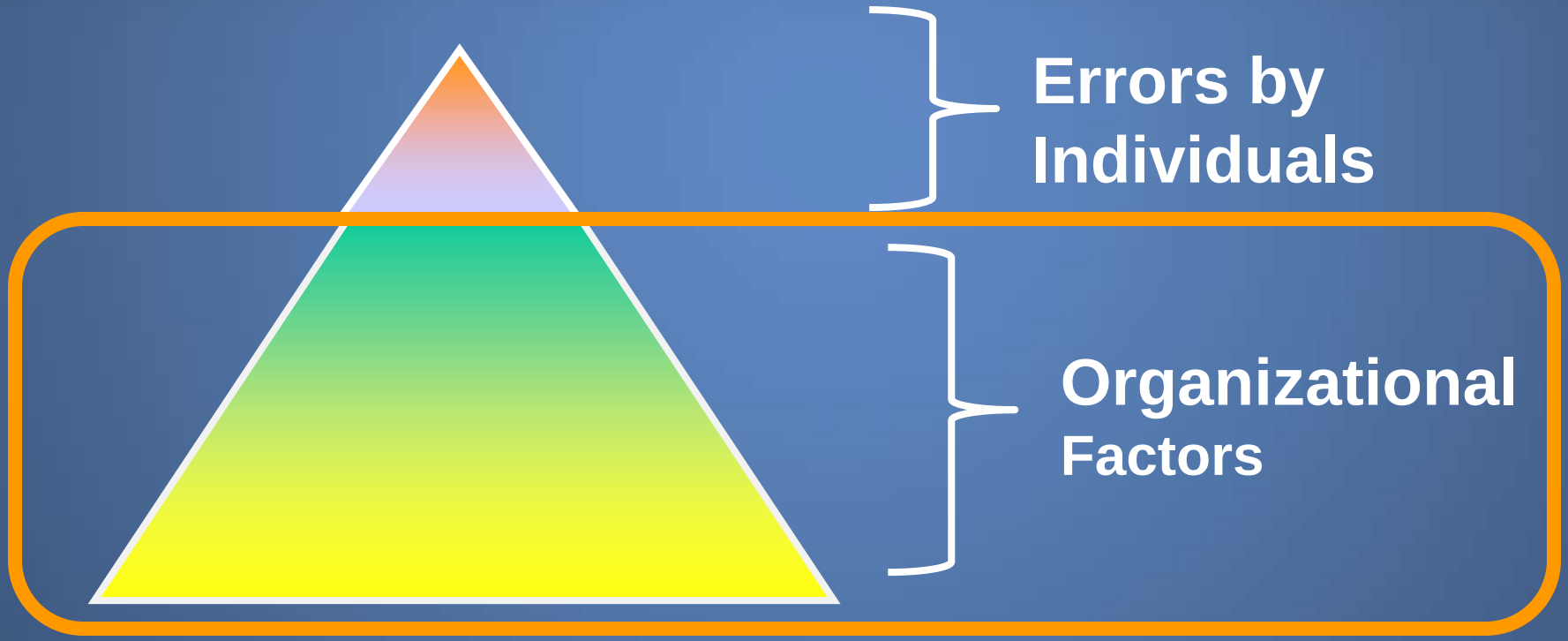
Buffalo, NY February 2009

NTSB

Munfordville, Kentucky
March 2010

"the truck driver's failure to maintain control of the truck-tractor combination vehicle because he was distracted by use of his cellular telephone."

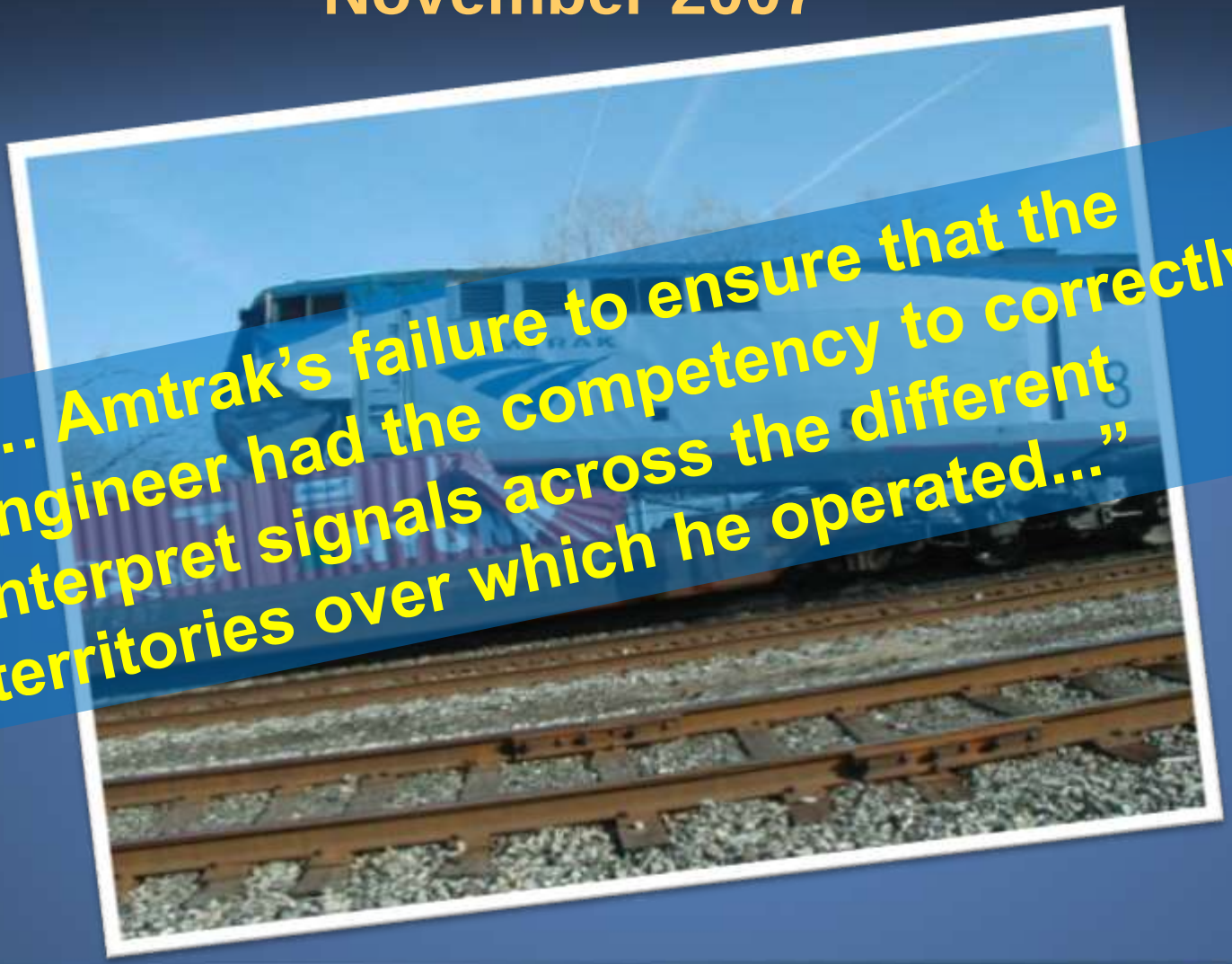
Accidents Involve Many Factors



New Brighton, PA
October 2006

NTSB

Chicago, IL
November 2007



"… Amtrak's failure to ensure that the engineer had the competency to correctly interpret signals across the different territories over which he operated…"

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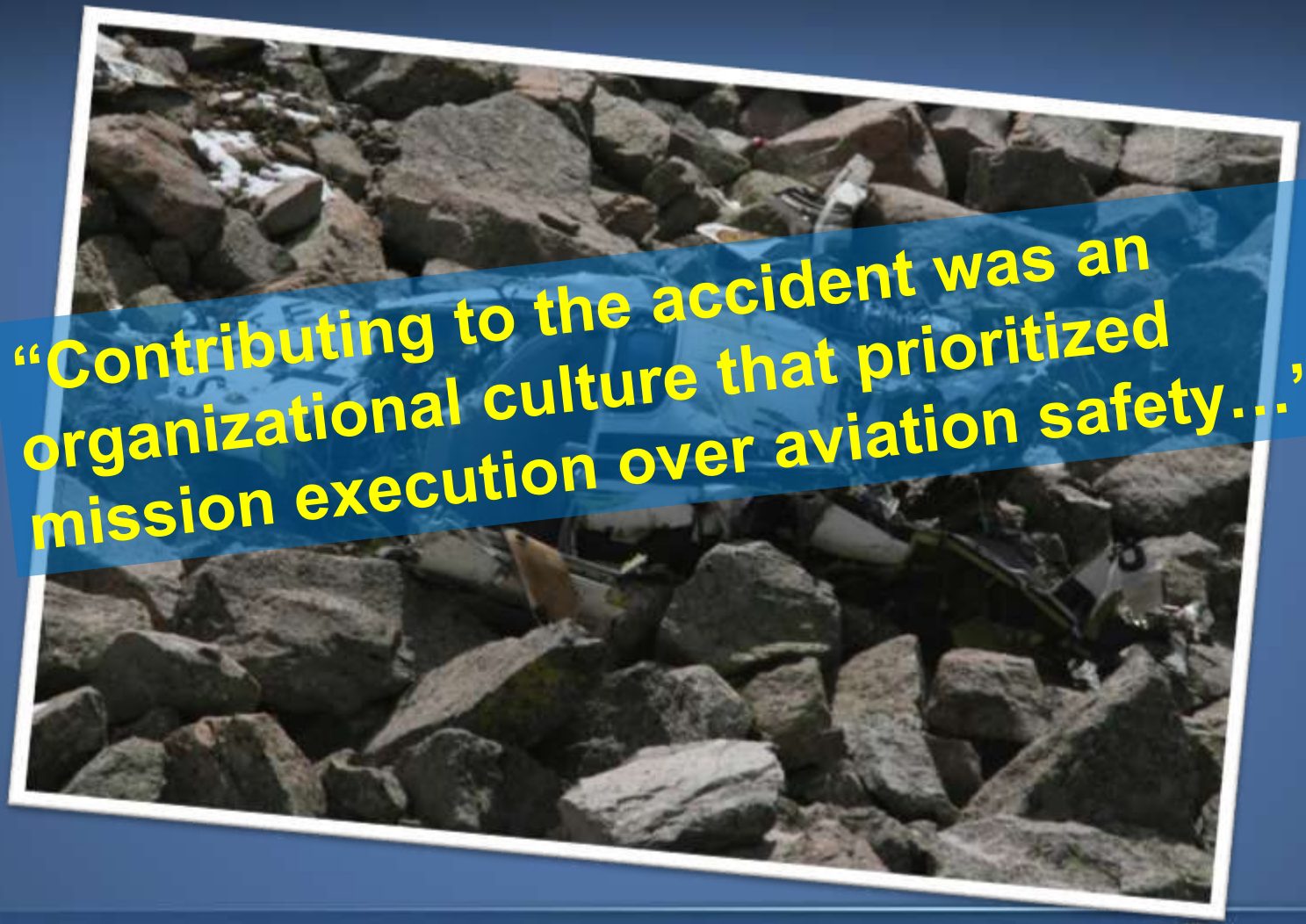
Washington, DC
June 2009

NTSB

Goodwell, OK
June 2012

Near Santa Fe, NM
June 2009

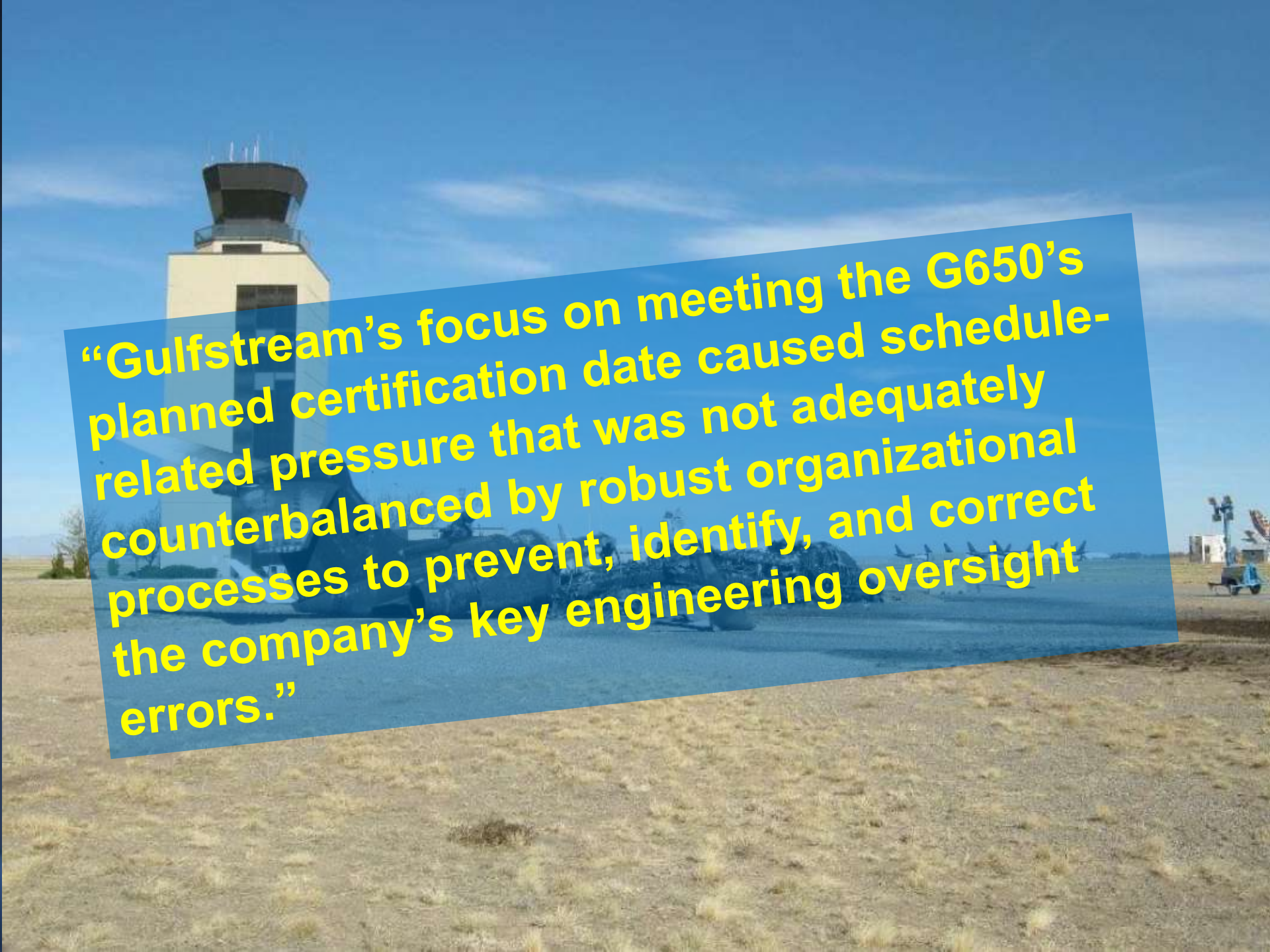


“Contributing to the accident was an organizational culture that prioritized mission execution over aviation safety…”

NTSB

Roswell, NM
April 2011

NTSB


“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.”

Bloomberg Business

News Markets Insights Video

Gulfstream Managers Blamed for Fatal Crash on Test Flight

by Alex Lerma

October 11, 2012 — 12:00 AM EDT

An artist's rendering of a General Dynamics Corp. Gulfstream G650. Source: Business Wire via Bloomberg

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 wa 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 1 2011.

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Could this be you?

Bloomberg Businessweek

News Markets Insights Video

Your Company's Management Blamed for Fatal Accident

October 11, 2012 — 12:00 AM EDT

Your company sued for millions. Company declares bankruptcy, ceases operations.

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“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?

NTSB

Washington, DC
June 2009

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Safety Culture is:

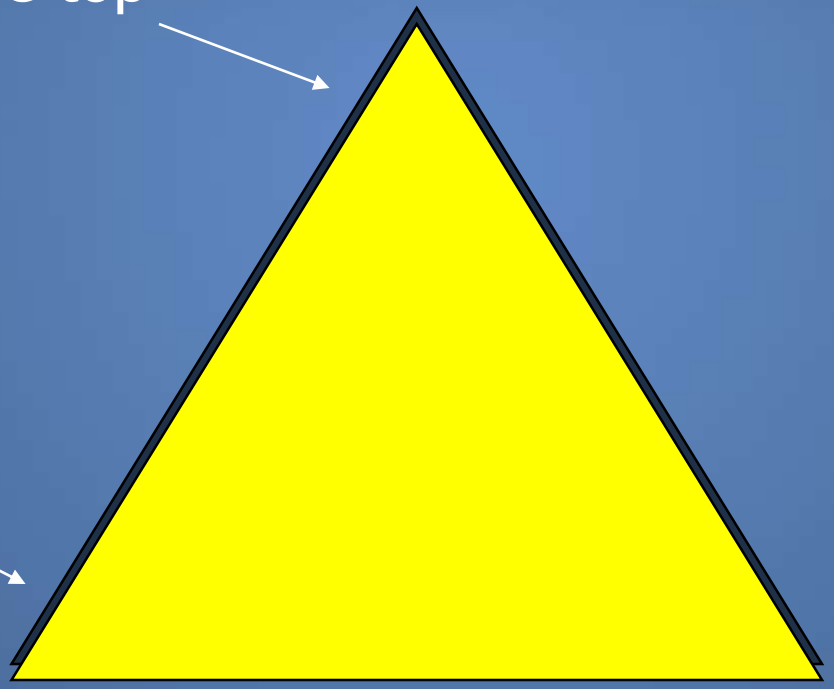
"Safety culture is the core values and behaviors resulting from a collective commitment by leaders and individuals to emphasize safety over competing goals to ensure protection of people and the environment."

Source: U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission

Safety Culture is:

Triggered at the top

Measured at the bottom



Safety culture starts at the top of the organization and permeates the entire organization.

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."

Creating a Future of Safety

ARE WE REALLY LIVING OUR VALUES?

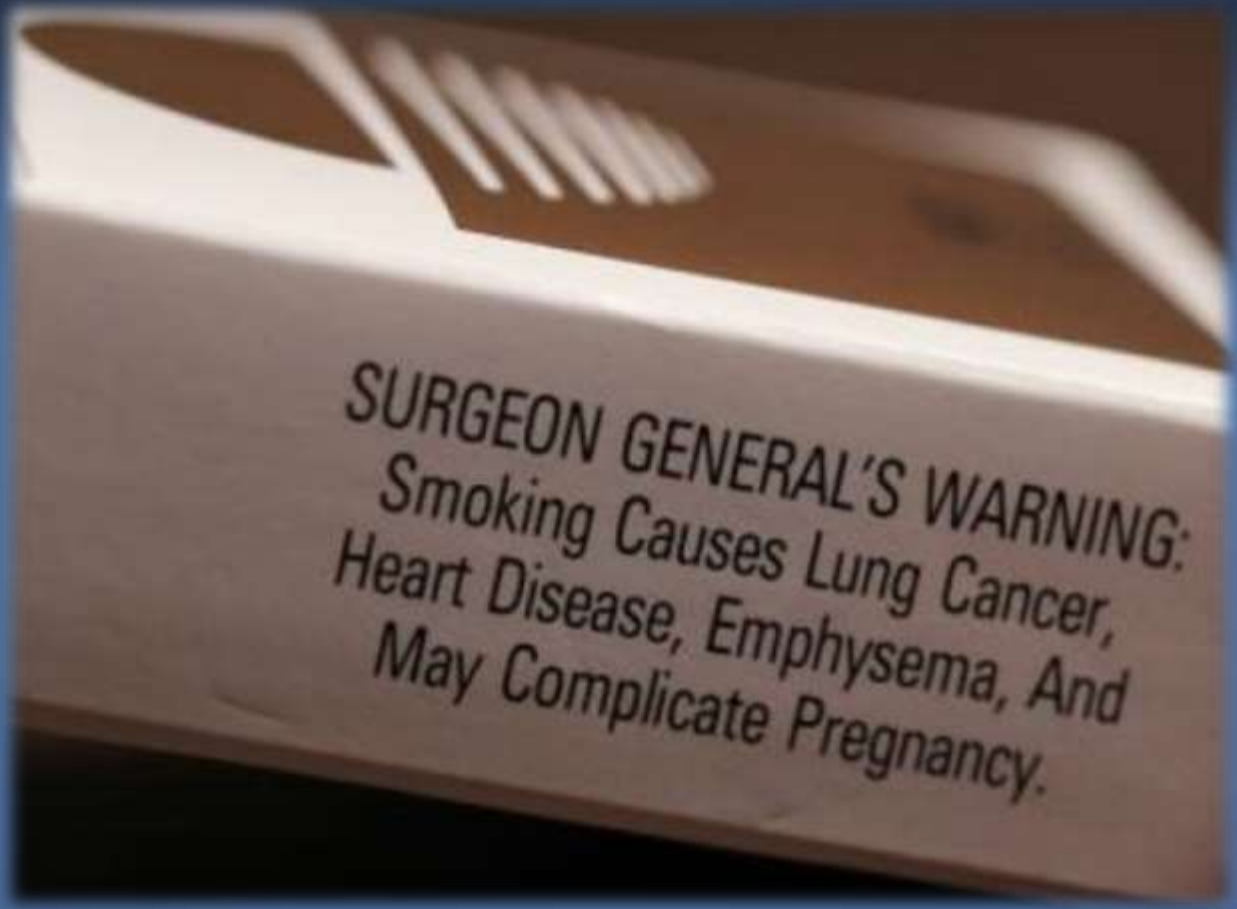
Values

- 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.

NTSB

CVS Stops Tobacco Sales

This move will cost CVS an estimated $2 BILLION in revenue

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

- Larry J. Merlo, CEO, CVS Health

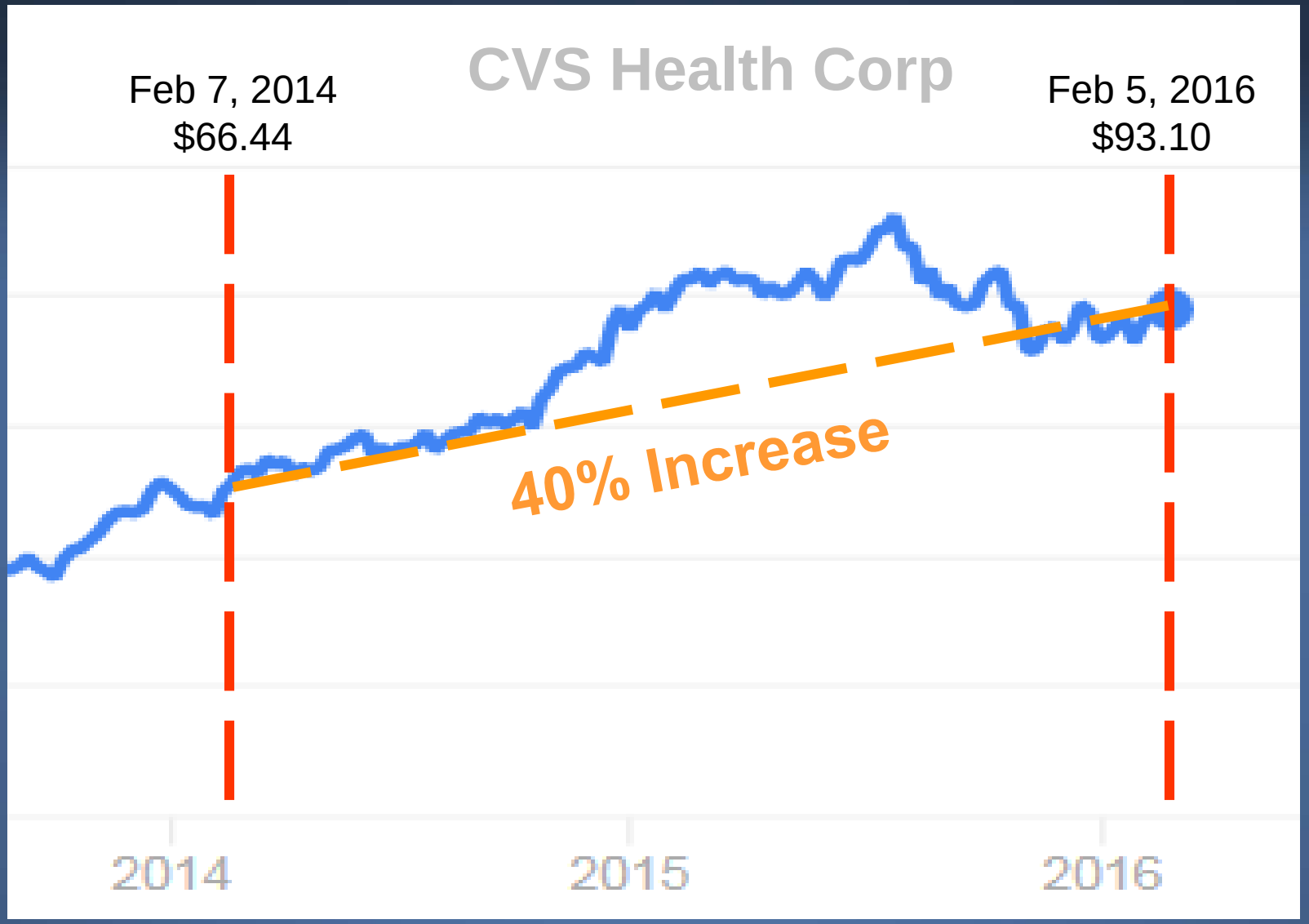
NTSB

"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

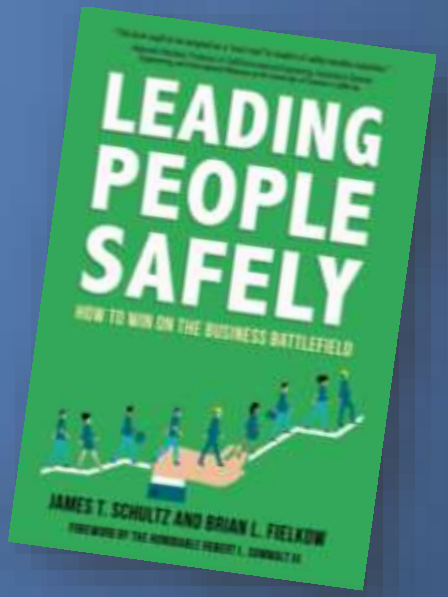

CVS Health Corp
Feb 7, 2014
$66.44
Feb 5, 2016
$93.10
40% Increase
2014
2015
2016

NTSB

“Organizations with strong leaders are those organizations that ensure their values are aligned and lived throughout the organization.”

“They do the right things by caring for the safety and health of their employees and customers.”

“Because of their commitment to values and caring, they have greater potential to perform well financially.”



- “Leading People Safely,” p. xxvi

Creating a Future of Safety

ARE WE TRULY PROVIDING SAFETY LEADERSHIP?

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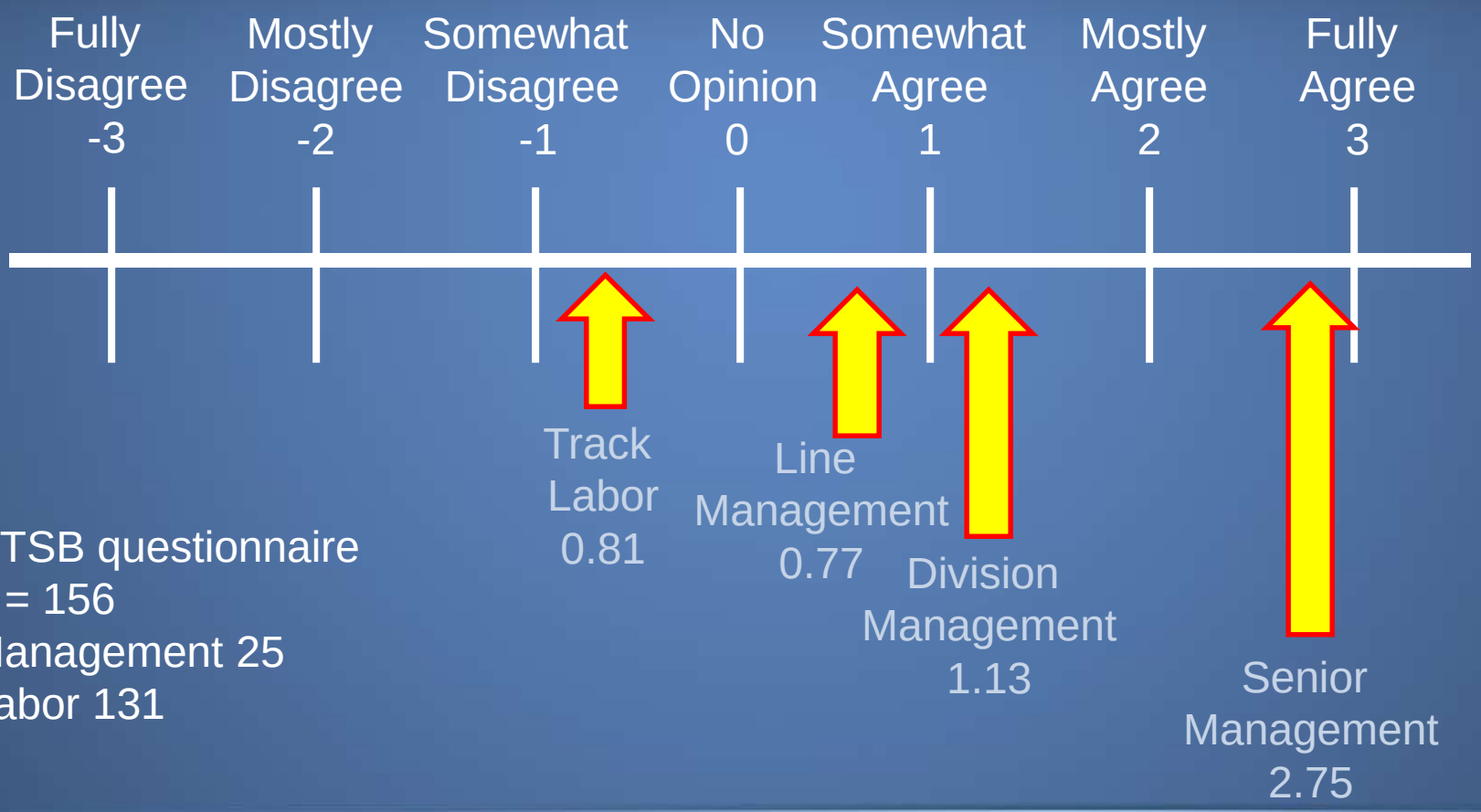
Metro-North Railroad

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.

NTSB

Employee Comments

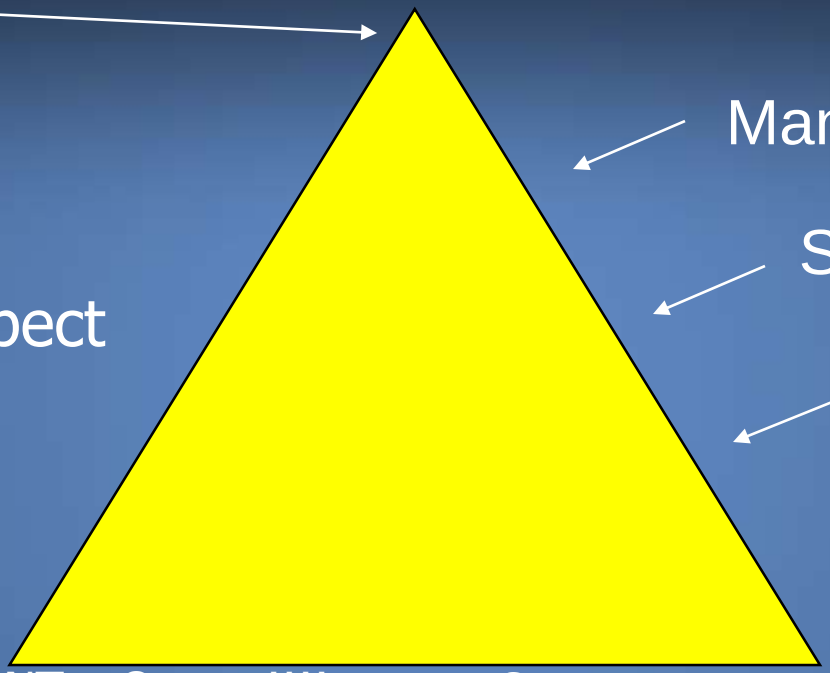
- “Sometimes I feel safety is priority one as long as it's convenient.”
- “Metro-North pays lip service to safety. On time performance & budgets take precedence over safety.”
- “The railroad only cares about the on-time performance.”
- “It’s all about on-time performance and safety rules are thrown out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

How leaders influence safety

"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

Sometimes the Message gets Distorted



Safety
Quality
Timeliness
Efficiency
Honesty & Respect

Managers

Supervisors

Coworkers

MOST IMPORTANT – Output!!!!

Cut corners to save money

Fear of retribution

Get job done at all costs

Unfair discipline

Work sucks

Call in sick for extra vacation day

WORD OF THE DAY

Thursday, October 27, 2016

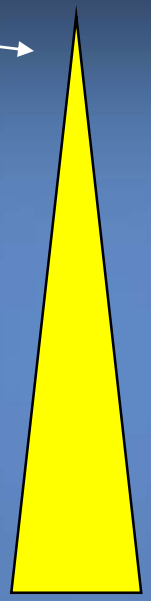
align·ment *noun* \ə-ˈlīn-mənt\

Where the leaders and front line employees, and everyone in between, share and practice the same values.

NTSB

Alignment

Safety
Quality
Timeliness
Efficiency
Honesty & Respect



Managers

Supervisors

Coworkers

Quality
Honesty & Respect
Efficiency

Safety
Timeliness

Are you on the right track?

“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

“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 truly providing safety leadership?

National Transportation Safety Board