

# *Creating a Framework for Safety Leaders and Senior Leadership to Impact Positive Safety Change*

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# Today's Learning Event Facilitator

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Dr. Ptak brings more than 40 years of industry, state government, public entity, healthcare, higher education, and TPA consulting experience in the fields of Health & Safety, Risk Management, Leadership and Organizational Development, and Human Resources. Scott brings valuable and practical field experience to his consulting clients as he has also served in the role of Vice President of Safety and Risk Management for both domestic and international organizations. He is a nationally recognized practitioner who speaks and writes regularly on Safety, Risk Management, and Leadership and Organization Development topics. Additionally, Scott is a Lead Instructor at the OSHA Training Institute and an Adjunct Professor within the University of New Hampshire System.



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# Today's Resources

- Today's Notetaking Guide
- A list of Reference Citations for the information shared in this session
- A Communication RoadMap
- A Diagnostic Communication Checklist
- Communication Barriers Between Senior Leadership and Safety Leadership



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# Today's Agenda

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1. Discuss the quantifiable organizational benefits of regular Senior Leadership and Safety Leadership communication and engagement.
2. Discuss Consensus Standard - ANSI / ASSP Z10
3. Speak to Safety Leadership's perceived and real obstacles to effective communication with Senior Leadership.
4. Q & A and Explanation of Available Resources
5. Answer the "WHY?" - Is this really that important?



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# Poll Question 1

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***In your safety leadership role, how often do you to meet with Senior Leadership (President / CEO, Senior Leadership Team Member, etc.) to discuss safety?***

- Frequently (4 to 6 or more times per year)
- On Occasion (2 to 4 times per year)
- Seldom (once per year)
- Never
- NA (I am not in a safety leadership position)



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# Executive Summary: Leadership Engagement in Safety

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1. Today's session highlights the measurable impact senior leadership has on safety performance and the importance of effective and consistent communication between Senior Leadership and Safety Leadership.
2. There is considerable research showing engagement from the top is one of the strongest predictors of reduced incidents, stronger safety culture, and tangible business value.
3. Practical examples are offered on how to re-start efforts in this area—including a list of issues to center leadership and safety discussions on based on a leading safety management consensus standard (ANSI Z-10).



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# Key Quantified Findings

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1. Multiple studies consistently report a 30% – 50% reduction in incidents when senior leadership is actively involved in safety.
2. In organizations with exceptional engagement, the reduction can reach up to 70% fewer injuries.
3. Leadership behaviors — visibility, communication, participation — show strong correlations with improved leading indicators, specifically safety reporting and climate.
4. This suggests leadership’s interaction in the safety area can have a significant impact on operational risk outcomes



# Safety Culture & Workforce Participation

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1. Safety culture strengthens when employees see leadership taking safety seriously.
2. Quantifiable research from academic studies show a strong, statistically significant link between leadership commitment and employee safety behaviors.
3. This isn't just attitudes — it translates into more near-miss reporting; better adherence to safe procedures; and higher engagement in prevention.
4. Leadership sets the tone; employees respond with safer behaviors.
5. To quote an old saying: *“You boss’s priorities eventually become your priorities”*
6. Real-World differences between two CEO’s – Ron and Harold.



# Organizational & Financial Benefits

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1. Beyond injury reduction, executives globally report that strong safety culture drives overall business performance.
2. Over 93% of executives indicate safety culture boosts productivity, retention, and operational reliability.
3. Financial returns from safety investments typically range from 6% to over 20%, driven by reduced incident costs and fewer operational disruptions.
4. Leadership engagement is not just a compliance activity — it's a strategic and financial advantage.



# Occupational Health and Safety Management System

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## Definition of OHSMS:

An Occupational Health and Safety Management System (OHSMS) is a structured framework—often aligned with other standards used by organizations to proactively manage workplace risks, prevent injuries, and improve safety performance. It integrates policies, procedures, and employee participation to identify hazards, assess risks, and ensure regulatory compliance.

## Key Components of an OHSMS

1. Leadership Commitment: Top management drives safety culture and accountability.
2. Hazard Identification & Risk Control: Systematic processes to identify dangers, assess risks, and implement controls (e.g., elimination, engineering controls).
3. Worker Participation: Involving employees in decision-making, hazard reporting, and training.
4. Emergency Preparedness: Plans for responding to incidents and emergencies.
5. Incident Investigation: Analyzing incidents to identify root causes and prevent recurrence.
6. Continuous Improvement: Regularly auditing and updating the system to improve performance.



# ANSI/ASSP Z10.0 – 2019 Origins

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## Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems

ANSI Z10 is a **Consensus Standard**. As a refresher, a Consensus Standard is defined as:

OSHA National Consensus Standards are safety guidelines adopted by nationally recognized organizations (like ANSI or NFPA) through a process aimed at reaching substantial agreement among stakeholders. While initially voluntary, these industry best practices often become legally enforceable by OSHA through adoption, incorporation by reference, or the General Duty Clause.

The ANSI Z10 Standard practice team first met in 1999 to discuss how Safety Management Systems could be best implemented across a variety of industries and organizations. Today, the practice team is comprised of over 55 different companies representing various industry sectors. The most recent version we are discussing today was adopted in 2019.



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# ANSI Z10 10.1 – 10.2 – Consensus Standard

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## Key Aspects of Consensus Standards:

- Development: Created by industry experts, professional organizations, and interest groups, rather than directly by government agencies.
- Voluntary vs. Mandatory: They are not laws by themselves, but OSHA uses them to define safe practices. If a standard is incorporated by reference in 29 CFR, it becomes mandatory.
- Examples: ANSI Z87.1 (eye protection), ANSI Z358.1 (eyewash stations), and NFPA 70E (electrical safety).
- Enforcement: Even if not formally adopted, OSHA can use these standards as evidence that a hazard is recognized, and a feasible method of abatement exists under the General Duty Clause.
- Goal: They represent "best practices" to improve worker safety and provide greater technical detail than general OSHA regulations.



# ANSI Z10 10.1 – 10.2 – Management Review

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## 10. Management Review

This section defines the requirements for periodic management reviews of the OHSMS.

### 10.1 Management Review Process

The organization shall establish a process for top management to review the OHSMS at least annually, and to recommend improvements to ensure its continued suitability, adequacy and effectiveness. (See Notes)

Inputs to the management review process shall include, among other information:

- a) Progress in the reduction of risk;
- b) Effectiveness of processes to identify, assess and prioritize risk and system deficiencies;
- c) Effectiveness in addressing underlying causes of risks and system deficiencies;
- d) Learning from system feedback loops;
- e) Input from workers, workers' representatives and interested parties;

# ANSI Z10 10.1 – 10.2 – Management Review

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- f) Status and effectiveness of corrective actions and changing circumstances;
- g) Follow-up actions from OHSMS audits and previous management reviews;
- h) The progress made towards meeting organizational objectives and targets;
- i) The performance of the OHSMS relative to expectations, taking into consideration changing circumstances, resource needs, alignment with the business plan and consistency with the OHS policy; and
- j) Information from top management relative to changes in the organization and its activities with a potential impact on OHS.

*Note 1: Management reviews are a critical part of the continual improvement of the OHSMS. This review is not just a presentation or a non-critical review of the system but should focus on results and opportunities for continual improvement. It is up to the organization to determine appropriate measures of OHSMS effectiveness.*

**This reads like a practical list an organization can consider for working towards a formal annual *leadership-safety* review. Thoughts?**

# ANSI Z10 10.1 – 10.2 – Management Review

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*Note 2: Results of the management review should be made available to affected individuals.*

## 10.2 Management Review Outcomes and Follow-Up

At the conclusion of the review, top management shall determine the:

- a) Future direction of the OHSMS and opportunities for integration with business processes; and
- b) Need for changes to the organization's policy, priorities, objectives, resources or other OHSMS elements.

Action items shall be developed from the findings of the management review. Results and action items from the management reviews shall be documented, communicated to affected individuals and tracked to completion (Section 9.4).

*Note: Affected individuals include those impacted by or responsible for addressing findings of the management review so appropriate action may be taken. Examples of affected individuals include workers, contractors, workers' representatives and any existing OHS committee(s). as applicable.*

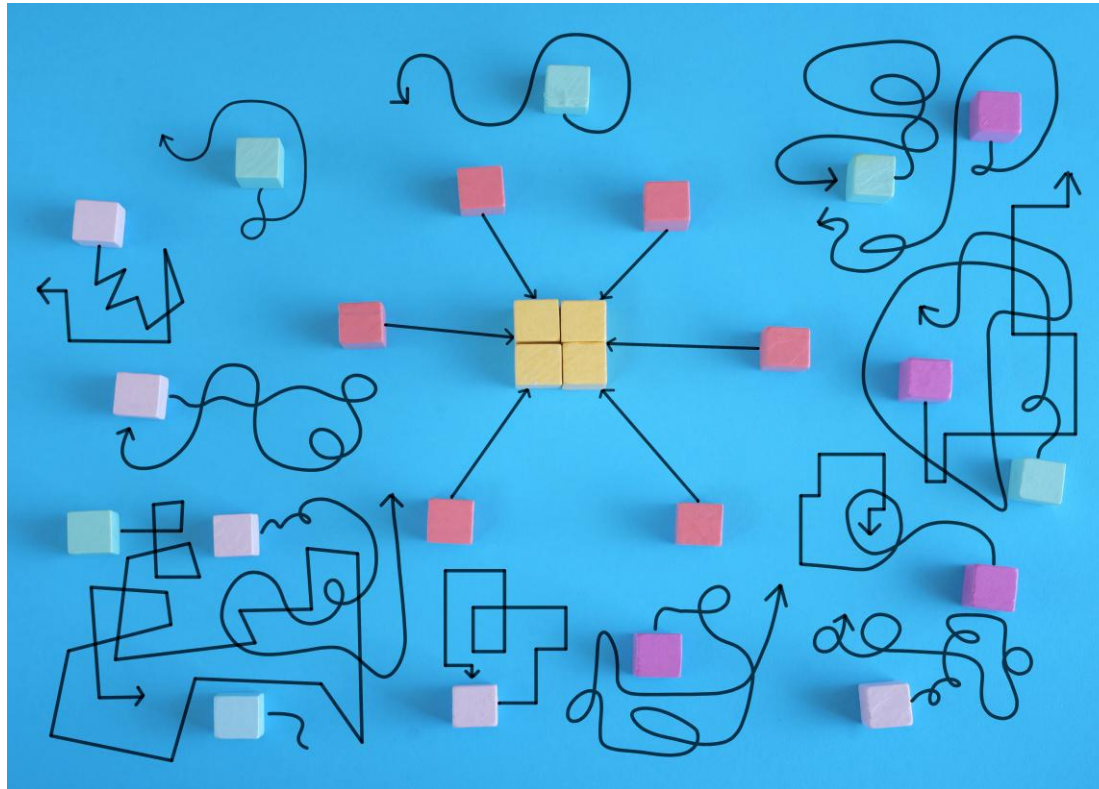


# Pause for Entering Your Questions



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# Communication



How many options do we have today for communicating with each other?

# Communication Barriers Between Senior Leadership and Safety Leadership

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Several recurrent structural and behavioral obstacles tend to undermine communication between senior leadership and safety management leaders. In high-reliability and industrial contexts, these gaps can materially weaken risk governance and operational resilience. Key impediments include:

## 1. Divergent Strategic vs. Operational Framework

- It is normal for Senior leadership to focus on *macro-level* business strategy, capital allocation, and market positioning.
- Safety leaders operate in a *micro-operational frame*—controls, incident precursors, regulatory compliance, and field-level risk signals.
- This difference in vantage point creates a divergence in what each group considers “material” information.

# Communication Barriers Between Senior Leadership and Safety Leadership

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## 2. Competing KPIs and Incentive Structures

- Executive scorecards typically emphasize productivity, financial performance, and operational excellence.
- Safety teams prioritize leading indicators, exposure reduction, and procedural adherence.
- If incentive architectures conflict, communication is filtered by the need to defend one's metrics rather than solve systemic risks.

## 3. The Executive Level May Not Posses an “In Common” Understanding of Day-to-Day Safety Challenges

- Many executives do not have deep familiarity with risk-control systems, barrier management, or incident-causation models.
- As a result, safety briefs may be misinterpreted or deemed overly technical, causing leadership to underweight critical signals.



# Communication Barriers Between Senior Leadership and Safety Leadership

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## 4. Over-compression of Safety Data for Executive Consumption

- Safety management often condenses complex risk profiles into aggregate dashboards (TRIR, LTIR, near-miss counts).
- These metrics are lagging and can obscure underlying drift, normalization of deviance, or control degradation—leading to misguided executive assumptions of “green equals safe.”

## 5. Cultural Barriers and Psychological Distance

- Safety leaders may perceive senior leadership as disinterested (often, unfairly).
- Senior leadership may perceive safety leaders as overly conservative or obstructive (often, unfairly).
- This fosters guarded communication, with both sides filtering or softening information.
- Ongoing dialogue is often enough to change the perspectives of both!



# Communication Barriers Between Senior Leadership and Safety Leadership

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## *6. Fear of Escalation Consequences*

Safety managers may hesitate to escalate significant concerns when:

- Past escalations have been dismissed,
- Reporting has led to blame or reputational penalties,
- Leadership is known to react defensively.
- This erodes vertical information flow and hides weak signals.

## *7. Lack of Structured Communication Pathways*

- Without defined governance routines—risk reviews, hazard reporting, safety walk-downs, escalation protocols—communication becomes ad hoc and inconsistent, making it easy for critical information to fragment or stall.



# Communication Barriers Between Senior Leadership and Safety Leadership

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## 8. Time-Pressure and Bandwidth Constraints

- Executives often have limited cognitive bandwidth for granular hazard discussions.
- Safety leaders, conversely, operate in detail-rich environments where nuance matters.
- The mismatch can cause important context to be stripped away, leading to oversimplified decisions.

## 9. Overreliance on Middle Management for Translation

- Middle managers frequently act as intermediaries between executives and safety staff.
- If these layers filter information—intentionally or inadvertently—distortion and signal loss occur.



# Communication Barriers Between Senior Leadership and Safety Leadership

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## 10. *Misalignment on What's "Acceptable Risk"*

- Executives may implicitly accept a higher operational risk threshold to meet business objectives.
- Safety leaders generally operate with a lower threshold.
- If this is not explicitly negotiated, communication becomes adversarial.

**Failure to work through these obstacles in a productive manner can contribute to a safety "program" plateauing.**



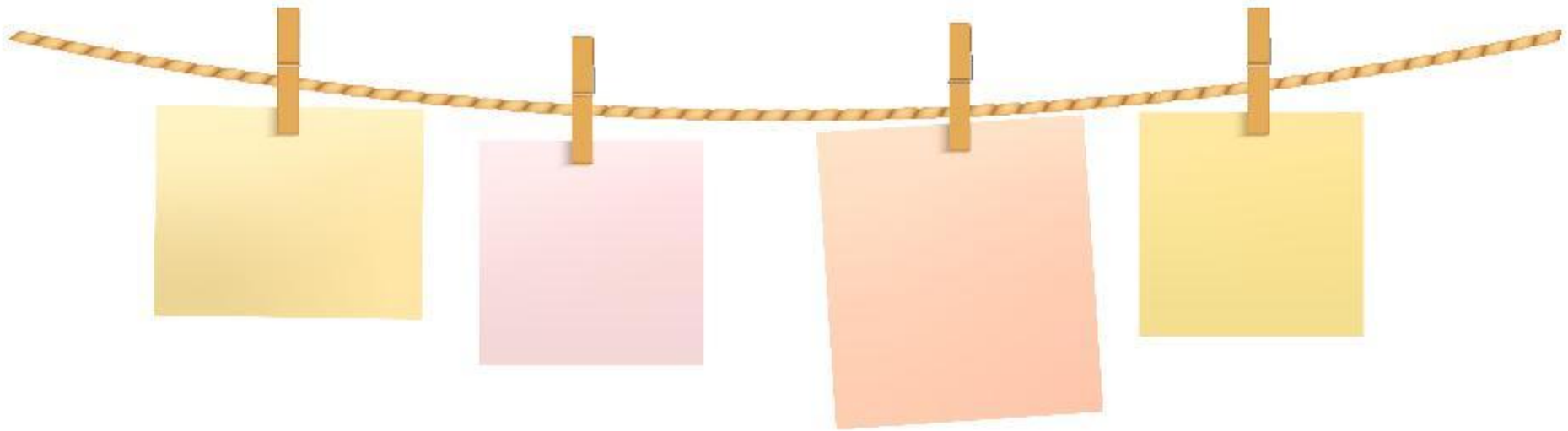
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# Time for Some Practical Solutions

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# Tips to Reduce Communication Barriers Between Senior Leadership and Safety Leadership

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Senior Leadership: Mayor, City Council, Selectboard, HR, Legal, Finance

*Actual conversations and responses I have had with Senior Leadership:*

1. ***“I just don’t have the time”***. While safety is critical to a successful organization, with so many items on the CEO’s plate, it is hard to find the time to meet with Safety Leadership. It doesn’t often rise to the critical level – it’s just part of doing business.
2. ***“I’ve never been asked to meet, so I just assume no news is good news”*** Safety Leadership has never asked them to meet!
3. ***“When I did meet with them, I never got anything of value”***. When they tried meeting, Safety Leadership offered no quantifiable or actionable methodology to impact overall results and move the organization forward. It was never tied to the success of other parts of the organization.



# Tips to Reduce Communication Barriers Between Senior Leadership and Safety Leadership

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## Safety Leadership – Some MUST understand items:

1. What do you bring to the table that's worthy of the CEO's time?
2. Are you just pointing out all the things that are wrong without offering viable solutions? Auditor vs Consultant
3. Has the culture historically supported this type of communication between Senior Leadership and Safety? If not, how do you intentionally build the rapport to change the culture?



# Tips to Reduce Communication Barriers Between Senior Leadership and Safety Leadership

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## Safety Leadership – Some MUST understand items:

1. Do you bring quantifiable data to support the changes you want to see?
2. Are you speaking their “language” – (finance, operations, HR)? If the CEO comes from a finance background speak to them in terms of ROI and numbers, if they come from HR speak in terms of employee morale, quality of life, etc., If they come from Operations, address how it can positively impact production and the entirety of the operation.
3. If they just don’t “get it”. It is the Safety Leadership’s job to make it relatable and to speak to Senior Leadership in their language. Be **“Passionately Persistent”**.



# Tips to Combat Communication Barriers Between Senior Leadership and Safety Leadership

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## Safety Leadership – Some **MUST** Understand Items:

- 1) Often CEOs don't truly and fully understand the weight of their words to their subordinates. If a CEO continually mentions the importance of safety – at every opportunity, and actively models it, it becomes the mantra of the organization. **Your bosses' priorities become your priorities.**
- 2) Safety isn't just part of an Organizational Mission Statement to be hung on an expensive frame in the lobby, it should be integrated into the entirety of the organization. Sharing and reinforcing the importance of top-down communication should be embraced by every member of the senior team.
- 3) Have you been “**Passionately Persistent**” in trying to set a meeting to underscore the benefits a viable Safety Department brings to the table?



# Some Additional Ideas

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## Communication Barriers Between Senior Leadership and Safety Leadership

*Several recurrent structural and behavioral obstacles tend to undermine communication between senior leadership and safety management leaders. In high-reliability and industrial contexts, these gaps can materially weaken risk governance and operational resilience. Key impediments include:*

### *1. Divergent Strategic vs. Operational Frames*

*Senior leadership often focuses on macro-level business strategy, capital allocation, and market positioning.*

*Safety leaders operate in a micro-operational frame—controls, incident precursors, regulatory compliance, and field-level risk signals.*

*This difference in vantage point creates asymmetry in what each group considers “material” information.*

# Some Additional Ideas Cont.

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## Diagnostic Checklist: Senior Leadership - Safety Management Communication

### A. *Strategic Alignment & Risk Governance*

#### 1. *Risk Tolerance*

- Has senior leadership explicitly defined an acceptable risk threshold?*
- Do safety leaders understand and agree with that threshold?*

#### 2. *Integration with Business Strategy*

- Are safety implications routinely assessed during strategic planning?*
- Are safety leaders invited to strategic decision-making forums?*
- Do safety leaders perceive their input as materially influencing decisions?*



# Some Additional Ideas Cont.

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## Corrective Action Roadmap: Senior Leadership ↔ Safety Management

### **Phase 1 — Stabilize & Create Transparency (0–30 days)**

**Objective:** Establish clarity, unfiltered information flow, and immediate governance routines.

#### **Actions**

#### **Establish Interim Communication Cadence**

*Stand up weekly senior leadership–safety leader syncs (30–45 minutes).*

*Require structured safety briefings (critical risks, leading indicators, barrier status).*

**Owner:** CEO / COO / Safety Leadership

**Output:** Reliable communication rhythm and shared situational awareness.

#### **Define Interim Escalation Protocol**

*Document triggers for immediate escalation (e.g., barrier failures, red-risk deviations).*

*Communicate the protocol across operations and safety teams.*

**Owner:** Safety Director

**Output:** Clear, organization-wide decision tree for escalation.

#### **Unfiltered Operational Risk Review**



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# The “WHY”? Is This Really That Important?

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Why do we in Senior Leadership or Safety Leadership do what we do? Is it a just a job, has it become a career over the years, or is it a calling?

In order for you to become the most effective version of yourself in the workplace, you have to know the answer to that question.

From my experience, most safety professionals got into the business in order to be able to help people, keep them safe, and get them home at the end of the day back to the people they love and that love them.

That understanding is ultimately the reason we met here today. While the information shared has great value and the ANSI standards and regulatory compliance items discussed are meaningful, all of this discussion today ultimately falls under the umbrella of keeping your people safe and getting them home to their loved ones. Regardless of the title you hold, that is YOUR charge and that is a huge part of your responsibility to your employees.



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# Reference Citations

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*All of the findings presented today come from a combination of peer-reviewed academic research, industry-wide surveys, organizational case studies, and safety leadership analyses.*

## **Academic & Peer-Reviewed Research**

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2. Christian, M. S., Bradley, J. C., Wallace, J. C., & Burke, M. J. (2009). Workplace safety: A meta-analysis of the roles of person and situation factors. *Journal of Applied Psychology*.
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4. Huang, Y., et al. (2016). Safety climate and employee safety performance: A meta-analysis. Published through the *U.S. National Institutes of Health* (PMC7363040; PMC9246271).

## **Industry & Organizational Research**

5. Purdue University, Process Safety and Assurance Center (P2SAC). Process Safety Management Leadership Elements: Quantitative Impacts of Leadership Engagement. *Purdue University College of Engineering.purdue.edu*.
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7. *National Safety Council (NSC). (2021). Safety Leadership: Leading Indicators and Executive Engagement.*
8. *American Society of Safety Professionals (ASSP). (2020). The ROI of Safety and Health Management Systems.*
9. *ANSI / ASSP Z10 – 2019 Sections 10.1-10.2 American National Standard for Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems (OHSMS)*



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## Industry & Organizational Research

10. Purdue University, Process Safety and Assurance Center (P2SAC). Process Safety Management Leadership Elements: Quantitative Impacts of Leadership Engagement. *Purdue University College of Engineering.purdue.edu*.
11. *SafeWork Australia*. (2018). The Impact of Leadership on Occupational Health and Safety Performance.
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14. *ANSI / ASSP Z10 – 2019 Sections 10.1-10.2* American National Standard for Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems (OHSMS)



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