



## SAFE TIME

### Safety is NOT a Priority

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**IF** the above is true, why then do corporations and leaders say safety is a priority?

Safety, for a start, cannot be a priority. The priority of a business is to make profit. Only safety consultancy has safety as a priority, but it is related to generating profit from safety. By having safety as a priority, it will conflict with all other so-called priorities such as quality, uptime, profit, etc. It is hard to be an employee while being told everything is a priority. So what is the place of safety in an organisation?

Allow me to look at this conundrum from another angle.

I have a collection of original Coke in glass bottles originating from all over Asia Pacific and South Asia. It was painstakingly collected over the years. The cost price is about US\$20 (excluding all the difficulties I encountered in trying to buy and bring home the bottles). How much would it be worth to a Coke collector? Obviously, each collector will value the collection differently. The premium given depends on how the person 'values' it over and above the 'price'.

How does this relate to safety?

Modern safety began with the calculation of losses (which remains very relevant today). It would be easy to calculate the replacement cost of equipment or a product, downtime, etc. It becomes harder as we try to calculate the cost of reputation, the hidden cost of an accident or the value of those harmed.

To put it more personally, ask yourselves these questions:

- 1) What is your value to you?
- 2) What is your value to your parents?
- 3) What is your value to your loved ones?

The typical answer I get for these questions, while running training courses and workshops all over Asia Pacific, is "I

cannot put a price on myself – it is invaluable". Even amongst the three questions, the degree of 'cannot be measured' is different to each party. To a family that depends on the person for subsistence, the value is even higher. Parents also tend to value their child more than the child values himself/herself. It is very difficult to put a numerical number to the value of a person.

Safety should be a VALUE. Value is not price, and it is deeper than priorities. Value is close to our heart; it ranks amongst others with integrity. By positioning safety as a value, it no longer conflicts with other priorities.

As a value, safety becomes part of what companies and employees believe. Some call it the safety culture. It usually starts with a safety climate that evolves over time to become a safety culture. Thus it is now possible to put safety 'first' by instilling safety values rather than safety priorities into the business strategy.

To achieve this, we must have our values right, so that we take actions with risks that are acceptable not only to ourselves, but also to others who value us. This behaviour can only be nurtured on the backbone of a strong technical safety programme (traditional safety management system).

Over the next few months, I will look at safety from the value perspective before moving on to technical safety.

For alternative views and comments email me at [kengyan.shum@gmail.com](mailto:kengyan.shum@gmail.com). ■

*SKY still has a hard time trying to get people to understand that we can delegate tasks, but an injury cannot be delegated (it is hard to 'share the pain' so to speak). Have a safe month!*

## Engineering Jokes from the Internet

A young labourer brags to the other workers about all sorts of things. One day he decided to brag that he could outdo anyone in a feat of strength. He made a special case of making fun of the engineer on the site. After several minutes, the engineer had had enough.

"Why don't you put your money where your mouth is," said the engineer. "I will bet a week's wages that I can haul something in a wheelbarrow over to that outbuilding that you won't be able to wheel back."

"You're on, little guy!" the braggart replied. "Let's see what you got."

The engineer reached out and grabbed the wheelbarrow by the handles. Then, nodding to the young man, he said, "All right: Get in."

*Adapted from [http://www.grahamnasby.com/misc/engineering\\_jokes.shtml](http://www.grahamnasby.com/misc/engineering_jokes.shtml)*