



## **DISCIPLINE and PASSION**

### **A KEY INGREDIENT IN THE FOUNDATION MIX OF SAFETY**

One major safety problem for most companies is the lack of discipline amongst their employees. A safe operation requires discipline - thinking of consequences, cleanliness, orderliness, punctuality, compliance and other habits which require personal discipline. It is so much easier to just ride on the back of Lady Luck and hope nothing bad will happen. We have a serious case of **PDI** (Previously Disadvantaged Individuals) in safety, with most employees growing up in an undisciplined manner, in terms of safety.

We naturally tend towards laziness. We are creatures of habit and the one habit we have in common with other species is the habit of conserving our energy – we don't move unless we have to or there is a benefit attached to us doing so. We are much better at being passengers, enjoying the ride, rather than being the drivers and taking responsibility for the journey to reach our destination. There is no risk in being the passenger as it is easy to blame the driver.

We also resist change because we are comfortable with the familiar. Once we have become set in a certain way, we do not want to change, unless there is a compelling reason for us to get out of our comfort zone or change our habits.

DISCIPLINE is a key ingredient in the foundation mix of safety. NO discipline means NO sustainable safety. There are two types of discipline in safety. Discipline as in the military sense and self-discipline.

Most companies deal with discipline like in the military, where discipline means marching in step, obeying instructions, following the rules “nomakanjani” (come what may). You cannot fight a war if each soldier does as he pleases. Discipline in the military is achieved by practice, repetition, consistency and working together as a team “nomakanjani”. This is a useful approach when dealing with the cardinal, lifesaving, non-negotiable rules.

The crown of discipline is SELF-DISCIPLINE - everybody taking safety seriously, all the time, without policing, at work and at home . . . . the habit of doing the safe thing and working to a code of conduct. A close cousin to self-discipline is PASSION. Commitment – Dedication – Focus – Consistent – Concentration - Perseverance. These all are features of passion.

The best way to explain the strong link between passion and self-discipline is the sports analogy. World class sportsmen and women have an immense passion for their sport. As a result of passion, they develop the self-discipline to get up at the crack of dawn and into the water or onto the track to practice, practice, and practice, every day to improve their skill and performance. They play to the rules of the game and are fanatical about reaching their goals to become (world) champions in their field. These champs have bridged the gap between reason and desire.

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## THE POWER OF DISCIPLINE

The Road to Safety Discipline is a tough one, spanning a four-pillared bridge of self-discipline - cleanliness, orderliness, punctuality and compliance.

- Cleanliness – not only spit & polish, but also no waste, no spillage, no effluent and being able to “see” safety.
- Orderliness – not only storage and a place for everything and everything in its place, but also identified, demarcated, and to a set standard and procedure.
- Punctuality – not only on time, but keeping to commitments, being dependable, reliable and trustworthy.
- Compliance – understanding and respecting rules and procedures, heeding warning signs, standards and codes of practice.

What is called for are independent safety thinkers and consequently **active safety employees**. They must not sit on the side line, full of excuses and wait until someone else / the company makes safety happen for them – and if it does not happen they blame others or whatever conditions. We have to grow safety **BEE** – Behavior (safety) Empowered Employees.

To establish safety self-discipline initially takes concentration, time and effort. When we practice long enough and consistently, safety becomes a habit. We have to get people from beyond understanding and even accepting the reason for safety, to having a deep felt desire to practice safety. Safety turns out to be a value, when it is engraved in people’s hearts and is something we do without thinking. It comes naturally to us.

How to grow employees to be passionate about safety and thus safety self-discipline? This is the most demanding challenge you will face in terms of behavioral safety. The time of ‘do as you are told’ is gone forever. People now demand “Einspruchsrecht” (the right to partake in decisions which affect them, including safety). There is no easy answer to establish a culture of safety discipline. I use the player / coach analogy. The player has to show up and practice, which includes doing things that are not fun like fitness training, or in a safety sense, good housekeeping. The coach must be, consistently, a safety VIP – Visible, Involved, Pro-active, This LEADERSHIP ROLE is critical. Leadership is not a destination, but a never ending journey of:

- Lead by example, always be visible and set the right priorities
- Set goals, clear expectations, have a zero tolerance attitude and break these down into manageable, smaller steps people can master
- Overcome resistance to change – pain versus gain
- Make it easier to do what you want your employees to do = establish the rules and provide resources, including your time
- Give feedback on performance (good & bad) and constant encouragement
- Reward / support good performance
- Celebrate champions

Thanks to Douglas Kruger for planting the seed in his article – [The Discipline Difference](#)