

Is Your Safety Integral? Value-based behaviors are not added requirements

Should safety be a priority? No – priorities change regularly, and to prevent unintentional injury primary attention must be given to safety on a daily basis, without compromise. Thus, safety leaders refer to safety as a “value” – even a **core** value.

Does industrial safety imply “going beyond the call of duty?” No – safety **is** the call of duty. Injury prevention requires that safe-operating procedures and hazard identification and removal become an integral part of every undertaking. Anything less must be considered incompetent.

People want to be competent at tasks that are important to them. When they believe their jobs are important, and safety is a value integral to competent performance, people want to work safely all the time. Thus, safety leaders improve job competence by helping people make safe work practices and hazard elimination **integral** to their everyday work routines.

What is Integral?

But what does it mean to make something integral? Integral is not an “add-on” or even a “special addition.” It is much more than realizing and experiencing an important supplement or extension to one’s job responsibilities or resources.

The first definition of “integral” in my American Heritage Dictionary is “essential or necessary for completeness.” Let’s explore this meaning and its connection to occupational safety and health. Perhaps this can inspire new ways of teaching industrial safety and addressing the challenge of achieving and

maintaining an injury-free workplace. First, let's review the difference between a priority and a value.

Priority versus Value

Years ago in the October 1991 issue of *ISHN*, I explained the difference between a "priority" and a "value" by asking readers to reflect on their preparation for work in the morning. Briefly, after getting out of bed we usually follow a regular routine or agenda before leaving the house. Many of these "get-ready" behaviors are considered priorities – they are important, but not always essential.

Imagine getting up late. Do you shift your priorities? You might skip your stretching or exercise routine, a shower, or even breakfast. But one set of behaviors will never get compromised, because they reflect a value rather than a priority. Yes, I'm talking about getting dressed -- the universal activity in people's morning routine. As young children we are taught to always "cover up" before going out. That's a value.

Value-based behaviors are not "add-ons," "after thoughts" or even part of a "proactive program." Rather, they are activities incorporated naturally into a task and deemed indispensable for effectiveness. In a word, these behaviors are "integral." What does this mean?

How can we help people relate to the real meaning of "integral?" Let's consider instructive connections to the most motivating, heart-rending and painstaking of all human endeavors – the development and maintenance of an interpersonal relationship.

An Integral Relationship

Most people have experienced the excitement of developing a new personal relationship. Some of these are considered critical additions to one's life – a gift that adds substantial happiness and a sense of personal fulfillment. You make personal adjustments to your daily routine to make this new relationship a priority in your life. But we don't always make a relationship integral.

Many circumstances can hinder a shift from “extra” to “integral,” including environmental and time constraints, previous and current relationships, and interpersonal communication barriers. Often family relationships are not integral, leading to interpersonal conflict, emotional turmoil, and disparaging separations.

It seems, for example, that some children are viewed as an addition to a family, rather than an integral component. Babysitters are hired, day-care deliveries made, and meal times are adjusted to handle an extra mouth to feed. Yes, some quality time might be spent with children, but what are the parents' perceptions?

Is this life change viewed as an add-on requirement or an invaluable opportunity to contribute to the development of a life-long caring and interdependent relationship? Do parents look forward to and plan for their limited quality time with children (and with each other)? Or, is their day so occupied with job requirements that time with family is unanticipated and merely considered an “add-on” to a busy day?

This scenario is relevant, of course, to the development and maintenance versus dissipation of all relationships. Interpersonal relationships will improve and persevere to the extent they become integral to one's everyday existence. As such, opportunities for interpersonal communication, comfort, and intimacy are perceived as integral -- more than an extra "gift" or "positive reinforcer." This means intermittent thoughts, fantasies, and even communication with others occur to support and envision opportunities to build and enjoy a relationship. These should happen in spite of a hectic schedule that limits occasions for relationship-building and one-on-one appreciation.

Relevance to Safety

This discussion of "integral" and "relationship-building" relates directly to safety. In an injury-free workplace, safety is incorporated into every aspect of a person's workday. When safety is truly a value, it is not an extra responsibility or a supplementary set of requirements or regulations. Values are integrated into every relevant aspect of human existence.

Making safety a value is as challenging as it is to cultivate the best kind of mutually supportive and sustaining relationship. Our experience tells us this is not easy to do. But whether for safety or relationship-building, the extensive time and effort needed to make this happen are investments that reap maximum long-term benefits. And, for both types of challenges, the more one procrastinates in making relevant behaviors integral, the more difficult it can be to achieve the best. Indeed, some delays enable the evolution of barriers extremely formidable to overcome.

Interpersonal Imbalance

It's not unusual for personal relationships to be inequitable or out of balance, meaning one person contributes more than the other. This happens when one individual views the relationship "integral" while the other considers it an "add-on." These kinds of relationships are not mutually supportive, they often cause or foster emotional upheaval, and they frequently end with someone getting hurt.

Can you see the connection to safety? How often do safety leaders experience interpersonal imbalance when attempting to reduce the possibility of personal injury? Actually, industrial safety is often perceived as an interpersonal confrontation because one person considers safety as integral to the job, while the other person views the safe operating procedures as unnecessary supplements rather than integral essentials. Many who act as if safety is only an extra requirement get lucky and dodge personal injury, but not everyone. Some get hurt because of an imbalance. This add-on outlook for safety is misaligned with the healthy perspective of safety as a value integral to every task of the competent worker.

In Conclusion

I've heard several safety leaders use the *ISHN* "getting-ready-for-work" story to explain the differences between a priority and a value. Then they point out that safety should become a "value" linked to every "priority." What does this mean?

This presentation defined “value” further by claiming that safety-relevant behaviors must be “integral” rather than “add-on” or “supplementary.” I justified this “integral” criterion by referring to interpersonal and family relationships – circumstances every reader has experienced in some form or another. I hope you’ll use your own personal example to teach the concept of “integral” and illustrate its critical role in making safety a “value.” If genuine, your relationship example will undoubtedly portray how challenging it is to reach this level of safety excellence. But your example can also show how rewarding “integral” can be.

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