## Authenticity: A Vision for the New Year

My last *ISHN* contribution (Dec. 2006) discussed leadership principles activated by the word LEAD.  I advocated using this acronym to provoke group discussion about the following:

**L** for Live, Listen, Learn, Love, and Leave a Legacy

**E** for Empathy, Energy, Empowerment, and Engagement

**A** for Audacity, and Achievement of success over Avoidance of failure

**D** for Data to support an opinion or perspective

I propose adding a critical A-word to this list—Authenticity.  In fact, I believe this word can give all of us beneficial direction for the New Year.  How about a New Year's Resolution to be more Authentic in our interpersonal relations?

### What is Authenticity?

Only with a clear operational definition can a word or concept guide behavior. My *American Heritage Dictionary* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991) defines authenticity as "the condition or quality of being authentic, trustworthy, or genuine" (p. 142). And, the first definition of authentic is "conforming to fact and therefore worthy of trust, reliance, or belief" (p.142).

These definitions can incite constructive discussion about the meaning of related words: trust, reliability, consistency, and genuineness with regard to improving organizational safety.  Even more behavioral direction is provided in two books with "authentic" in their titles—*Authentic Leadership* (Jossey-Bass, 2003) by Bill George, former chairman and CEO of Medtronic, and *Authentic Involvement* (National Safety

Council, 2001) by Dan Petersen, a safety-leadership guru who contributes regularly to *ISHN.*

The connection between these books is obvious: Authentic leadership yields authentic involvement.  Let's review the primary authenticity directives provided in these books.

**Authentic Leaders**

Authentic leaders "are more interested in empowering the people they lead to make a difference than they are in power, money or prestige for themselves.  They are as guided by qualities of the heart, by passion and compassion, as they are by qualities of the mind" (George, 2003, p. 12).

Authentic leaders are vulnerable and always open to corrective feedback, and they demonstrate self-discipline to continuously improve.  Bill George claims you cannot be authentic without compassion.  Compassion is developed through profound understanding of other people's situations and feelings.  Empathy is a synonym for compassion, and was discussed in my last *ISHN* article as a critical E-word for the LEAD acronym.

According to my dictionary, however, compassion is more than understanding and identifying with another person. It also includes "the inclination to give aid or support or to show mercy" (p. 300).  Mr. George suggests leaders develop compassion by listening to others' life stories, by volunteering for community service projects, by having mentoring relationships, and by traveling through developing countries.

People with empathy and compassion lead others with purpose, meaning, and personal values.  They don't put an inordinate focus on short-run profits.  They don't

motivate through warnings and threats, thereby de-motivating the development of self-accountability—a key component of authentic involvement.

## Authentic Involvement

Authentic involvement is self-directed, and occurs when people are "treated like a mature, adult human being; as an equal, not subordinate, able to use their innate intelligence and skills daily, even hourly; able to achieve; given responsibility; and recognized for doing a good job" (Petersen, 2001, p.46).

So who treats employees like this?  You know the answer—authentic leaders. Actually, all of the leadership principles reflected in the LEAD acronym are relevant here.  Effective leaders enrich their work culture and help workers become self-directed, self-accountable, and self-motivated.  Dr. Petersen advocates an integration of the humanistic and behavioristic approaches to understanding and helping people.  This is, in fact, the foundation of People-Based Safety ™, which I call "humanistic behaviorism."

## Problem-Solving Training

Petersen advocates shared decision making between salary and hourly workers, with each side recognizing the need for interdependent cooperation.  But for this to happen, managers, supervisors, and hourly workers need training on how to interact effectively throughout a systematic process of balanced problem solving and decision making.  He suggests training on specific analysis techniques, such as statistical process control (SPC) which includes the use of fishbone diagrams, pareto charts, flowcharts, control charts, and scatter diagrams.  Bottom line: Balanced and shared decision making among managers and hourly workers requires mutual training on effective problem-solving tools and methods.

**Problem-Solving Mechanisms**

Dr. Petersen also discussed a variety of practical ways to enable regular employee input on safety-related matters, thereby facilitating authentic involvement. The following techniques are described in more detail in Petersen's book:

1. Safety Improvement Teams—Management asks employees to address a specific safety issue.

2. Job Safety Analysis—Work groups define specific environmental and/or behavioral hazards associated with each step of a job and develop ways to eliminate or control them.

3. Hazard Hunt—Employees use a special form on which to report anything they feel is a hazard, followed by corrective-action feedback from management.

4. Ergonomic Analysis—After training on ergonomic principles, workers observe the various behaviors of a job and consider ways to decrease the probability of a cumulative trauma disorder.

5. Incident Recall Technique—Through one-on-one interviews, employees relate a specific close call they experienced or heard about, suggest contributing factors to the incident, and then explore ways to prevent similar incidents and potential injuries.

I would add the observation and feedback process of behavior-based safety to this list, including employees' development, application and refinement of a critical behavior checklist (CBC).  Workers use this CBC to coach each other, which includes observing safe vs. at-risk behaviors on the job, defining barriers to safe behavior and facilitators of at-risk behavior, and providing constructive behavioral feedback to the

worker.  This process, familiar to most *ISHN* readers, sets the stage for authentic involvement.  But of course, the quantity and quality of actual employee involvement are dependent on management support.

Actually, none of the employee-involvement techniques listed above can work without sufficient management support and authentic leadership from both supervisors and workers.  This is easier said than done.  Example: What happened to those safety-suggestion boxes once found at most industrial sites? Answer: They were not used constructively and removed because of insufficient leadership among managers and hourly workers.

### In Conclusion

In recent January contributions to *ISHN* I have provided concepts or directives relevant for a New Year's Resolution.  Last year I proposed we try to slow down and live in the moment.  In 2004, I suggested a paradigm shift.  Instead of asking "Who, what, or why?" after an incident, ask "How can I help?" And, "Yield the Right-of-Way" was my proposition for 2003.

For 2007, I propose we try to be more authentic. Facilitate group discussions around behavioral definitions of "authenticity," with particular reference to industrial safety. Then decide what it takes to "walk such authentic talk".  This will likely result in a list of practical and relevant things people can do to make 2007 better than 2006 at keeping people safe.

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