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The Problem with ZERO Goals and Results Part 2

Article by Alan D Quilley CRSP

Part One of this article explored the illogical nature of the position that “All Incidents/Injuries/Spills and/or Other Unintended Negative Outcomes Are Preventable”. In Part Two, we’ll explore the false belief that zero makes a good safety target...

Zero incidents/injuries/spills and/or other unintended negative outcomes mean that during the period of time measured, that the work accomplished was done safely.

1) The Problem with Zero Visions/Goals/Commitments

Much has been written and debated about Zero Harm/Injuries/Accidents. Many questions and emotions come to the surface when discussing the natural moral desire for humans to do work without the unintended result of injury/damage to people, property, process and/or the environment. Wanting people and our possession undamaged by following our designed processes is a logical desire.

Let’s take a logical approach to this challenge for what some suggest is absolute perfection. What are we going to do to create the future where no-one is hurt doing their work. By the way, I truly believe that stating anything “absolutely” creates an impossible scenario. “ALL, Zero, Every” are examples of words that have been demonstrated as impossible in the human experience. Exceptions ARE the rule in every form of science and human experience. Nothing in human experience has proven ourselves to be perfect performers of anything. So we must conclude from the overwhelming evidence that we humans are fallible. We can be excellent, superb, and outstanding but perfect is not really available to us, even if we believe it’s possible, it is not. It can be tested and replicated in the workplace and in the laboratory. Humans make mistakes. It’s part of our very nature. It is indeed responsible for our very evolution in knowledge and skill. We can explore a bit more on mistakes later in the article.

2) Lofty Goals Do Not Increase the Chance of Lofty Accomplishment...Hard Work and Diligence Does

There is no scientific evidence that supports the causal relationship between the level of challenge of the goal and the accomplishment of the goal. In fact, there is an increased chance if the goal is impossible that you will have predicted the impossible future. Grand statements of intent do not directly correlate to grand accomplishments. CEOs and other leaders setting “stretch objectives, visions and/or missions” for their corporations do not in any way increase the chances of accomplishment. Doing the hard work necessary to increase the possibility of an outcome does increase the chances an outcome will be realized. Peter Drucker said it best, “The best way to predict the future is to create it.” Please note he didn’t say “talk about it.”

3) The Problem with the “Believe or You Can’t Make It Happen” Pressure Tactic

There is absolutely no science to the false statement that if you don’t believe in something that the results won’t happen. There is no doubt that believing in efficacy (the effectiveness of a process) increases the desire to do the tasks related to the desired results. I don’t believe that humans can “prevent the unanticipated”. That doesn’t mean that I believe we can’t manage the many factors we CAN anticipate. Saying and believing that ALL incidents can be prevented does not increase human capacity to be error-free nor does it change the reliability or strength of the physical things at our places of work. Failures will happen. In fact every human manufactured thing has a breaking point. Some have been scientifically designed and tested, some haven’t. Either way, nothing is unbreakable. Until humans doing activities to reduce and manage harmful energies makes a place safer, our belief has nothing to do with accomplishing a zero outcome.

4) The Problem of Measuring the Absence of Something as Proof of the Existence of Something Else

Rarely in our human experience has a Zero result meant anything else but for the measured time that the result wasn’t experienced. For example, measuring the number of collisions at a particular group of intersections for a set period of time could get you data that shows that there have been Zero incidents at those intersections. To conclude that the data means that the drivers at those intersections have accomplished the outcome because they were “safe drivers” is a major problem in logic and a total fabrication of causal relationships of factors. It’s almost guaranteed to be a wrong conclusion. It “could” be that they we are safe or it could mean that during that period of time we had a lot of lucky drivers or as I often say...good duckers. These drivers could be behaving unsafely but through good fortune were not feeling the negative consequences their unsafe driving could have resulted in. It is very bad science to use Zero results as proof of the existence of safe work. Creating causal relationships where none exist is harmful to credibility. Leaders suggesting that Zero = Safe are clearly misinformed. Therefore, Zero cannot and should not be used as a safety goal.

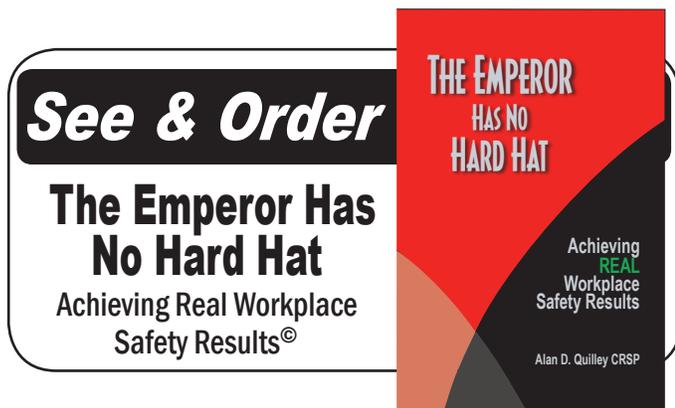
This historic misuse of injury data to demonstrate the existence of safety is akin to claiming that because you go to a General Practitioner annually that you will be healthy. As proof you haven’t been sick all year! The two sets of facts coexist in time but it is extremely poor science to create a causal relationship between your annual Doctor visits and your positive health outcome. It’s just as unfortunate that we have historically linked the lack of injury to our safety goals. No injuries experienced during any time period does not prove anything except that you haven’t had any injuries (of a particular type...which is back to the original topic of the thread).

If we want to prove the existence of safety we need to measure and report the...wait for it...it’s logical and inspiring...it’s doable and scientifically sound...are you ready...”the existence of safety”.

If Dan Petersen was right we wouldn’t use Zero at all. He wasn’t a fan of using injury statistics to prove anything...a couple of my favorite Dan Petersen quotes...

“Measuring health & safety success by measuring injury claims is like measuring how successful your car trip was by counting how many miles you DIDN’T drive.”

“Of course you can use frequency-severity figures to measure your firm’s safety program, as long as



you realize that in almost all instances these figures are absolutely worthless.”

5) The Problem with Visions Based on Beliefs and Not Facts

To believe something does not make it more likely. Believing in the existence of unicorns does not make it more likely that you will run into one in the local zoo. It doesn't work for unicorns and it doesn't work for Zero incidents/injuries/harm/environmental spills or anything else you don't want to happen. Lotteries work the same way...if belief did it many more millionaires would have been created by a great deal of “wishful thinking”. In risk management “wishing and hoping” isn't very functional. It certainly doesn't work for the statement that all injuries/accidents are preventable. The facts are that this is not true...believe it or not!

6) The Problem with “If You Don't Believe in Zero You Must Want to Hurt People”

If Zero is possible and Zero means “safe” then logically 100% safe is possible...isn't it? This simply is not true. Being realistic based on the evidence does not make you a bad person. Nor does it make you evil. I don't believe in perfection as a human possibility. That being the case, some human will with certainty make some mistake that wasn't anticipated and the result may be their injury or death. This is reality based on many hundreds of decades of evidence. Reality isn't wrong...the theory that ALL can be prevented is the error. Stating a logical conclusion only makes you a logical thinker. Stating things that are impossible and illogical makes you sound like a beauty queencontestant that will eradicate world hunger if she gets the chance.

The power of positive thinking is that it feels good. Nothing more, nothing less. Feeling safe doesn't reduce hazards nor the damage that they can cause.

So there you have it...Zero Harm/Injuries/Accidents sounds good...it is just illogical and impossible...so please think of another way to communicate your company's commitment to working safely.

As an example of what is better than a Zero injury Commitment why not try something like the following?

Our Company will strive to do our work in a safe and healthy way. We will use our knowledge gained by our experiences to constantly improve our behaviours and processes to ensure safety excellence in our work. This we can accomplish and will get us exceptional results.

The links humans have made to the “lack of injury” being equal to “working safely” is a HUGE error in logic. That's why Zero simply doesn't work as a safety process goal or measure. It is indeed meaningless.

Of course we're all happy if no-one is injured or killed...but it certainly doesn't mean anyone was safe. It could demonstrate that a group of humans did their work processes without unnecessary risk and that they were managing their risks in an intelligent and thoughtful way... but it could also mean that they were good “duckers” and were lucky enough to get out of the way of harmful energy!

As proof, the next time you stop to talk about an unsafe behaviour with an older worker...don't be surprised if the worker tells you what they are doing is “safe” because they have been doing it for YEARS without injury.

A replacement of measuring what doesn't happen to group of humans (injuries) is the gathered evidence that you are working “safety” through observation and discussion. In this context, working safely means “without unnecessary risk.” Risk is, as this article suggests, certain. Working in a “managed risk” way is clever, achievable and measurable through observation. It will also give you the predictable result of very few injuries. The best part of this is when a company celebrates creating safety, there will be no-one in the room knowing that they got there by hiding

injured workers in the “light-duty” tool room or reclassifying severity by accommodation to reach the ZERO goal.

So there you have it, the logical side of the debate. Feel free to email me your emotional responses if you’d like to share your thoughts and feelings. For goodness sake, if you’ve discovered a logical argument for “Zero Targets” or “All Incidents Can Be Prevented” please send to me your evidence and a description of the logical process used to demonstrate the position...so far in over three decades I haven’t run across any.

Coming Soon! New Product! CRSP Exam Prep Long Answer FlashCards!

Alan has been working very hard the last couple of months creating new product, our “Long Answer” CRSP Exam Prep FlashCards! The box contains 300 questions with answers (not multiple choice). The thinking behind these flash cards is based on, “if you can describe it to someone else, you probably know the subject matter well enough to expertly answer questions.” These questions are NOT designed to imitate those you will see on the BCRSP Examination. (The CRSPEX is presented with multiple choice answers. For those types of multiple choice questions, please see our “CRSP Examination Preparation Workbook” and our “CRSP Examination Preparation FlashCards”).

The file is at the printer and we are hoping to receive the first batch mid June. Once we receive, they will be available for sale on our site.

CRSP Examination Prep Workshop August 16 - 18 in Calgary!

Calgary - we’ve been listening and we’re coming to town to deliver our infamous CRSP Examination Preparation Workshop! The Workshop is taking place August 16 - 18, and does have a minimum participant registration to run. If you are wanting to take part, please don’t delay - book your spot early! For more details and to register, please visit our [CRSP Workshops](#) page.

BCRSP Notice of Upcoming Changes

“Effective **January 1, 2018** eligible candidates will have one (1) year to complete their first examination writing. If a re-write is required, candidates will have a one-year window from the time of first writing to rewrite the examination. A maximum of three (3) examination writings will be permitted. (This rule will apply to applicants/candidates approved for the examination after January 1 2018 - if you are already approved for the examination, the existing rule will apply) Effective January 1, 2018, one of the two required reference questionnaires (either professional practice or professional reference) must be completed by a CRSP (or equivalent such as CSP or CMIOSH) in good standing.

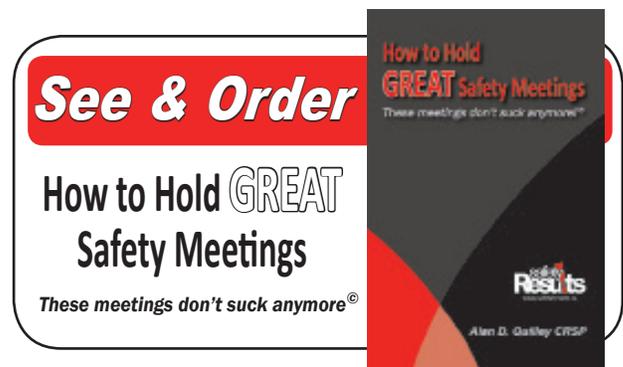
Changes Effective July 1, 2018

Applications for the CRSP certification received on or after July 1 2018 will be required to have the following:

- A minimum of a Bachelor’s degree (4-year) in any field OR a 2-year diploma (or certificate) (minimum of 900 hours or 60 credits) in occupational health and safety or a closely related field from a recognized academic institution.
- At least four (4) years of experience where occupational health and safety is at least 50%, preventative, professional level with breadth and depth of health and safety duties”.

On the Net

[Alberta government signs Memorandum of Understanding with police services setting out new procedures for investigating serious workplace incidents.](#)



CRSP EXAMINATION PREPARATION WORKSHOPS 2017

Sherwood Park	July 21 - 23, 2017
Calgary	August 16 - 18, 2017
Sherwood Park	September 22 - 24, 2017
Sherwood Park	November 24 - 26, 2017

Our 3 day CRSP Examination Preparation Workshop fee is \$949.00 + GST. Safety Results Ltd. wants you to be successful in becoming a CRSP. Here's why we think we can help and why it's important to research fully when you are comparing CRSP Examination Preparation Workshop providers!

We are an Alberta based business (since 1999) - support your local economy!

Our Workshop includes the following:

- Material updated to the current BCRSP Blueprint
- Our Manual and Workbook (\$600.00 value)
- Our CRSP Exam Prep FlashCards (multiple choice/quick answer \$105.00 value)
- Our Handbook which contains additional practice questions and answers (Handbook is available *only* to participants at the workshop)
- Material is contained in a coveted Safety Results canvas attaché bag which includes pen, highlighter, calculator, notebook for notes and Post-its.
- Lunches and refreshment breaks
- Special offer – We are the *only* workshop provider that has a special offer for participants of our Workshop: If you write the CRSPEX and are unsuccessful, you may attend another sponsored Safety Results Ltd. CRSP Examination Preparation Workshop for a nominal fee. The workshop must be taken within one year of your first workshop with us and further conditions apply - please check with us for more details. If you see other providers with this same offer, it will be because we did it first.

When broken down, the value added features of our Workshops cannot be beat. For more details and to register, please visit our [CRSP Workshops](#) page.

Please note that if you have registered for a workshop, but not paid for your spot, we are not holding a seat for you.

And remember that if you are unable to attend one of our Workshops, you can purchase the very same Manual, Workbook and Multiple Choice/Quick Answer FlashCards that our students receive in our Workshops. Visit our [CRSP Exam Prep Materials](#) page for more details!

