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The Problem with ZERO Goals and Results Part 1

Article by Alan D Quilley CRSP

This “Zero” Issue Just Never Seems To Go Away!”

I've been doing a great deal of thinking and writing about the variety of associated problems with using injury data to support the belief that low injury/damage results equate to a corporation being safe. The truth is that very safely operating companies have very low numbers of injuries and other unintended negative results. This is indeed something to celebrate. No-one being injured or becoming ill from their work is a wonderful result. As this two part article will describe, there are a few nagging and logical problems with automatically linking the result of low injury/illness/damage numbers to providing evidence that the work that was done during the period of measurement was done safely.

Don't get me wrong, I'm always happy to help celebrate when a client calls to have me be part of their celebration of low or even zero injuries. In fact, I'm typing this article while I sit on a bus waiting to leave for one of the Northern Alberta oil and gas employer's sites where I'm going to do a presentation during their celebration of working a very long time without anyone experiencing a lost time injury. I will cheer with them happily over their accomplishment.

So before we get too involved in the celebration of low numbers as proof that these people were working safely, let's explore the many problems with using those outcome measures to demonstrate a safe operation. There are two major areas of question and discussion: 1) Are all incidents/injuries/spills and/or other unintended negative outcomes preventable? 2) Does Zero incidents/injuries/spills and/or other unintended negative outcomes mean that during the period of time measured, that the work was done safely? The article will describe many problems with these two “safety standard” mantras.

PART ONE

All Incidents/Injuries/Spills and/or Other Unintended Negative Outcomes Are Preventable

1) The Problem with Absolutes

The moment a human utters an absolute, they are immediately wrong. Nothing in our history of human behaviour or experience has been proven to be 100% true or 100% false. If you don't believe me, try to find it yourself. What will happen is you will (for the most part) find exceptions to any absolute you can think of (notice how I avoided the absolute). That's not necessarily a bad thing, except if you are stating an absolute. So Zero and 100% are simple not logically available to us as targets or future visions unless of course we are prepared to be disappointed in never reaching our goal/vision.

In Safety Management, the tradition is to measure injuries and negative results as an indication of our success. This is not a reliable measure of the existence of safety. If you reflect on your own experience, there have been many times where you have taken unnecessary risks and not paid the price with unintended results (injury or loss). Even if Zero Harm/Injuries/Accidents is accomplished for a measurable period of time, it doesn't offer proof that the people accomplishing it have done their work safely. It is clearly NOT a good measure of safety as a feature of our work or play. Working and playing in a manner that doesn't put us at unnecessary risk could be seen as working or playing safely. It really is no more complex than that...It will never be 100% but these factors can be managed in a way as to produce highly predictable positive outcomes!

2) The Problem that the Reality of Risk Creates on Zero Goals of Any Kind

Anticipate, Evaluate then Control are the three proven steps to hazard management. The key feature is to provide appropriate controls based on what you anticipate could happen that you won't like as an outcome. The multiple factors that go into a careful evaluation of risk are, at best, an educated guess. There is a predictable possibility that sometimes we will be optimistic about our risk management solutions and unaware of an unknown factor that won't

become apparent until the negative outcome happens. Other serious deterrents to 100% preventability of all negative outcomes are the limited resources of time and money. Every organization and company has a defined amount of resources. These limits make ALL impossible. ALL would require super human insight into the future and unlimited resources to address every possibility no matter how unlikely. This would actually cause paralysis by analysis. No work would ever get done. We'd be too busy preventing all the possible hazards and spending all our resources and making mistakes impossible. ALL therefore is illogical.

3) The Problem of Manipulated Results to Meet the Impossible Goals/Visions

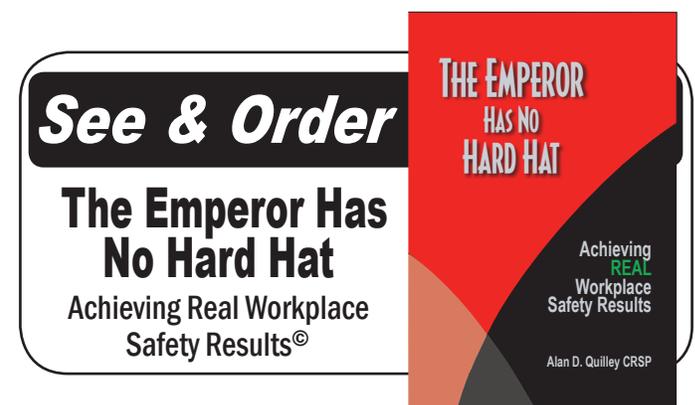
People tend to want to give the boss what they want. Zero results are often accomplished by manipulating the data. Reclassification of Injury types is a classic example of hitting the target by hiding serious injuries as non-serious by accommodation of the injured worker...so they don't show up on the stats!

4) Humans are Perfectly and Predictably Imperfect

Humans have proven themselves to be consistently and historically imperfect in their actions and thoughts. To add this imperfection to any formula of variables which will lead you to the conclusion that all incidents/harm/accidents are preventable is illogical and mathematically impossible. So you can say "ALL imperfect outcomes are preventable"...but you'll be wrong. Humans are simply and perfectly "imperfect".

5) Risk and Imperfection is Certain

The simple logic is that if two or more unpredictable factors meet...the results will be unpredictable



When human behaviour meets certain risk (as Dr. Robert Long so correctly states in “Risk Makes Sense”) the outcome will be imperfect. How can anyone resolve for this puzzle that all unpredictable negative results are preventable?

6) ALL Incidents Can be Prevented...Really?

Hindsight is perfect...our ability to predict the future is not. So I believe that all incidents can only be prevented after they have the insight gained by investigation. We seldom have this insight prior to the incident. If you have that kind of insight you should leave the safety business and PLAY the STOCK MARKET! See you on your own Pacific Ocean Island. We need absolute insight into the future and absolute control of events as they happen to prevent all incidents...we have none of that. The Safety Profession has to be the only profession debating “perfect”, “zero” and “all”. Other professions (medicine, engineering, law, even astrophysics) would never dream of using these kinds of absolutes in any discussion about humans and/or physical things. How we get (Certain Risk) + (Fallible Human) + (Unknown/Uncontrollable/Unanticipated Factors) = (Absolute Preventability) is certainly beyond me.

All of this logic leads directly into our next problem. The ZERO issues. There are many. From leaders in an organization “visioning” such a future and linking it to a “safety” goal, to the natural tendency of humans to try to accomplish the goal set out for them which leads to manipulations and “reclassification” of injury/damage data. More about these issues in Part Two in next month’s newsletter...until then...strive for safety excellence since safety perfection isn’t really available to you.



LinkedIn CRSP Exam Preparation Study Group

Alan created this group for those that are planning on writing the exam to discuss study strategies and tips. Join us at:

[Alan's CRSP Exam Preparation Study Group](#)

Safety Results Blog and Twitter

Read what Alan has to say!

[Blog](#)

[Twitter](#)

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.

On the Net

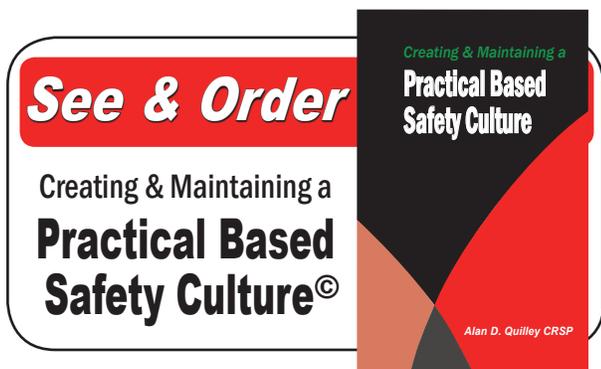
[Province, police join forces for workplace safety.](#)

The Alberta government is working with the province's police forces to coordinate the investigation of serious workplace health and safety incidents.

For our USA readers

[OSHA under Trump: A closer look](#)

Legal experts are predicting significant changes for worker safety regulation under the new administration.



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 Flash Cards (\$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 FlashCards that our students receive in our Workshops. Visit our [CRSP Exam Prep Materials](#) page for more details!

