

Leading Incident and Injury-Free Safety

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While developing the outline for this paper, Rick Strycker, one of the authors, related a recent experience that goes to the heart of what Leading Incident and Injury-Free® (IIF®) safety looks like. Here is Rick's story.

Last week, I bought a new television set at Sears. While I waited in the customer service department for my new appliance to arrive at the dock, I noticed a large, heavy-set man moving boxes from the main platform to the loading area where my car was parked. He wore a harness around his waist, the kind often used for heavy lifting, and I wondered if he might be nursing an injury. I glanced at his nametag – his name was Ralph.

When my name flashed on the digital reader board, indicating that my order was coming down the ramp, I hopped out of my chair and prepared to receive my TV. I could see Ralph coming through the large metal doors rolling a heavy, bulky box straddled across an orange hand truck. I quickly moved to the doorway to pull the doors open, eager to help. With a stern look, Ralph waved me back, pointed to a small silver knob at the top corner of the doorframe. "It's got a magnetic safety lock," he said, "so you won't get it open." As he pushed through the door from the inside, he breezed past me with his heavy load. "It's for your safety," he said, "and mine."

Still wanting to help, I hustled through the next set of doors and out to my car. I opened my car's rear door just in time for Ralph to slide the hand truck up to the tailgate. Quickly, he slid the huge box off the truck and into the back of my car.

"That's a heavy television you've got there sir," he said.

"Yes, it is," I replied.

After I slammed the rear door shut, Ralph set the hand truck aside, turned to face me, and spoke in a serious tone of voice, "Sir, this is a heavy appliance. I strongly suggest you don't try to unload this by yourself. Get a buddy." He then disappeared

back into the store. Driving home with my new television, I realized that Ralph might be a great example of an Incident and Injury-Free Leader.

As we look together at the attributes of *Incident and Injury-Free Leadership* throughout the next several pages, let us remember Ralph and see how he measured up.

A Short History of Safety Leadership

Over the past 100 years, the world of workplace safety has seen dramatic improvements that have saved many thousands of lives. Just imagine the ridicule Ralph might have suffered from his "macho" coworkers if he had worn a back protection harness 75 years ago. It is likely that his care and concern for personal safety, both his and mine, would have earned him mockery and scorn.

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*Rick Strycker
Global Director of Development
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New government regulations and policies in the early decades of the 20th century provided the first real incentives for organizations to protect workers from injury. In this first chapter of safety history, industry evolved from having little or no interest in safety to what JMJ Associates (JMJ) has termed the "Reactive Stage," referring to the phase when legislation was used as the primary tool to stop injuries that had occurred as a result of numerous workplace tragedies, such as the Triangle Building fire in New York City, several horrific mine accidents, among many others.

Several incremental changes over the first decades of the century eventually led to the second major stage of the

evolution of safety, what JMJ calls the “Preventative Stage,” which included a number of interventions designed to predict where injuries would occur next and prevent them. These approaches, which have continued to the present day, include systems, total quality, behavior-based, scientific management and others. As companies adopted new approaches, each development in injury prevention significantly reduced the risk of workers being hurt from a moderate likelihood to, in many cases, a very low likelihood. Everyone who has worked hard to produce these results through preventative measures should be proud of what has been accomplished. It has been a Herculean task and countless lives have been saved.

As many safety professionals are fully aware, the large amount of time, effort and money spent on safety today is not producing the dramatic level of reduction of incidents and injuries as it has in the past. For many organizations that have been working successfully to reduce injuries over many years, the number of reductions has leveled off. It has become clear that simply doing more of what has been done in the past, or even doing it better, does not eliminate injuries and incidents completely. Even with the magnitude of our past success, people are still getting seriously hurt every day at their jobs and tragically, some people are being killed. Exhibit 1 below examines this Evolution of Safety in the United States and Western Europe, which has moved from little or no formal interest prior to World War II, through the Reactive and Preventative Stages until about 1980. From that point to the present time, most organizations have experienced a plateau through which they are unable to penetrate, no matter how much money or management attention gets invested in the effort to do so.

After all our successes, should we now accept the current situation, saying, “we’ve done our best and no further improvement is possible?” Shall we conclude that it is simply inevitable that some people will die and many more will be hurt? Shall we accept the current condition as being the best we can do, perhaps the best that can ever be done?

In our conversations with clients located throughout the world, JMJ is increasingly discovering people who are unsatisfied with the conclusion that they have done their best and it is inevitable that some people will get hurt or killed on the job. Individuals are standing up in workshops, in board rooms, on shop floors, and in worksites from West Africa to Korea, from Ireland to Canada, proclaiming, “Injuries must stop,” and, “It’s going to begin with me!” This courageous act is the starting point of *Incident and Injury-Free Leadership* and it is starting a fire everywhere people speak out of a commitment to make a difference.

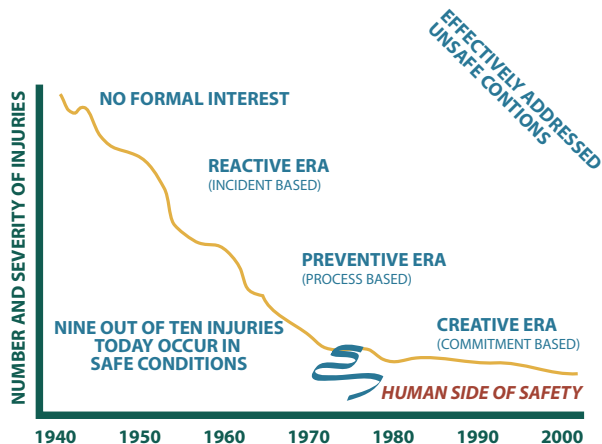
From JMJ’s perspective, the current situation in safety calls for a new stage of development, one that transcends and includes the earlier stages of reaction and prevention. We call this stage the “Creative Stage” because it requires us to bring forth something that could not have been predicted from the past. The creation of the *Incident and Injury-Free* approach was a response to the need of this time, and those who bring it forth are leading industries through the next and perhaps, the final breakthrough in safety performance.

What is an IIF Approach?

The *Incident and Injury-Free* approach was created by JMJ to harness the passion of committed people and channel it into dramatic breakthroughs in safety results.

The *Incident and Injury-Free* approach produces replicable results that have been validated in all kinds of settings, from projects to operating sites, small and large organizations, diverse and complex culture mixes, and both single-site and widely distributed work environments. The success of the program has been validated in both quantitative and qualitative evaluations and has produced significant reductions in injuries compared to projects and operating sites that did not use the *Incident and Injury-Free* approach. One Fortune 50 Company recently analyzed the safety performance of several projects and sites where the *Incident and Injury-Free* approach was deployed and compared the analysis results to several internal and external industry benchmarks, which typically indicated world class safety performance. The comparison revealed that projects and sites, which used the *Incident and Injury-Free* approach

EVOLUTION OF SAFETY



experienced a total recordable injury rate *lower than these already industry-leading benchmarks by a factor of ten or more*. JMJ has successfully made the *Incident and Injury-Free* approach both replicable and generalizable. However, to think of the *Incident and Injury-Free* approach only as a *program* is to miss the essence of what makes it such a powerful approach. The single critical factor to the effectiveness of the *Incident and Injury-Free* approach is the presence of individuals who declare it is unacceptable for anyone to get injured or killed at their workplace. Thus, they get into action to ensure their fellow workers return home safely to their families and loved ones. When a critical mass of these individuals forms in an organization, an *Incident and Injury-Free* workplace is born.

“An Incident and Injury-Free commitment is to the *elimination* of all incidents, injuries and deaths, *no kidding*.”

At first glance, it might seem most people already have this commitment. However, thoughtful, honest reflection on what one's commitment to safety in the workplace really is often reveals one's actions are not consistent with an authentic commitment to the elimination of worker injury, and it becomes apparent that often, we are committed to something much less than *Incident and Injury-Free* results. An *Incident and Injury-Free* commitment is not a pledge to “reduce injuries.” It is not a commitment to “improvement” or “doing better than last year.” An *Incident and Injury-Free* commitment is to the *elimination* of all incidents, injuries and deaths, *no kidding*. Any other commitment is not a commitment to an *Incident and Injury-Free* workplace.

Some people confuse an *Incident and Injury-Free* approach with the *Zero Injuries* approach that has been promoted extensively for several years. While the result sought by the *Incident and Injury-Free* approach is “no one getting hurt,” it differs significantly from a *Zero Injuries* approach. At the core of the *Incident and Injury-Free* approach is an organizational culture totally committed to the elimination of workplace injury, coupled with an ongoing personal and organizational inquiry into the subjective and objective challenges of safety. Like the *Incident and Injury-Free* approach, the *Zero Injuries* approach is intended to be in service of eliminating

injuries. However, the approach to attaining *Zero Injuries* is through producing better numbers, not by truly eliminating all injuries. Many people speak about the *Zero Injury* approach as a goal worth pursuing, but in reality they do not see it as something that is really achievable. For these people, *Zero Injuries* is often a code for “getting better at safety.”

The difference between an *Incident and Injury-Free* approach and “improvement” is not a subtle distinction. It is radical and mind-bending. If you authentically engage in what this commitment means, you will most certainly confront personal objections, “That's not reasonable!” or possibly even, “That's insane!” If you confront the basic question at the root of *Incident and Injury-Free* results, you will undoubtedly experience a conflict with assumptions commonly held as truths. In our experience, confronting these truth/assumptions is a difficult, yet profoundly rewarding experience. We have found that conventional ways of thinking about safety performance, although successful in the past, have now brought us to a limiting barrier in our performance. The way we have thought about safety in the past is not wrong; rather, it is incomplete and therefore not sufficient to get us to *Incident and Injury-Free* results.

Certainly, it is a challenge to go beyond our traditional ways of solving problems. It is a part of our nature as human beings to look for “tried and true” solutions to problems we face on an ongoing basis. We look for “technical” solutions because they produce quick results and they require less energy and resources from us to implement. However, eliminating workplace injuries and producing *Incident and Injury-Free* performance is not the kind of problem that can be resolved with “off the shelf” solutions. It is what we at JMJ call an “adaptive” challenge, one that has not been resolved before and therefore has no simple (i.e., technical) solution. An adaptive challenge is one that we must learn our way through in order to solve. In other words, we must change our thinking and *ultimately ourselves*, in order to resolve the challenge and find a new, effective solution¹. An example of dealing with an adaptive challenge follows.

In a large construction project in the Middle East, the Owner's project management team, based on their commitment to *Incident and Injury-Free* results, asked the contractors how they would work during the summer without having any heat-related injuries. The contractors replied with the usual answers that have produced good but not necessarily *Incident and Injury-Free* performance in the past. A typical response was, “Our foremen will watch for workers who are showing signs of heat exhaustion; those workers who appear to be overheating will be taken into shade to rest and given plenty

of fluids.” The Owner’s project management team questioned how the contractors’ foremen were going to be able to ensure this answer would work since this job was so large and so spread out. It seemed they could not possibly watch all of the workers all of the time. The difference between someone just being overheated and experiencing heat exhaustion was too slight to rely solely on the foremen being in the right place at the right time and exercising the right judgment. As the safety leadership team, comprised of owner and contractor leaders, kept examining the question, “How do we do this work without anyone suffering a heat related injury?” they learned how to create new, effective solutions to this age-old problem. The foremen’s role changed to making sure each worker received a prescribed amount of rest and water during the day. Management reinforced with the foremen that this was their highest priority during the summer, rather than productivity quotas. Scaffolding was put up under a pipe bridge to provide a shaded work area. Worker meals at the labor camps were adjusted to provide more fruits and vegetables to create a diet more appropriate to working in these extreme conditions. The project was completed that summer without any heat-related injuries and as a result, productivity was noticeably improved.

The *Incident and Injury-Free* approach requires new thinking, but it is more than just a way of thinking. It is allowing our deep and profound value for the lives of people, and our care and concern for the families of our workers, to deeply touch us. This is the true essence of an *Incident and Injury-Free* commitment. The work of the *Incident and Injury-Free* approach leads us to deepen our relationships with people and to make sure we never relate to human beings simply as numbers or statistics, or solely as subjects of programs or improvement methodologies.

Although measurements and methods are also important, the key to creating an *Incident and Injury-Free* workplace is to make sure all people go home safely to their families every day, without exception. Although this point may seem simplistic and blatantly obvious, it is easier said than done. Certainly, in many organizations, some workers do not go home safely at the end of their workday, in spite of the extensive litany of programs, measurements, management attention and money that has gone into workplace safety. We live in a culture driven by measurement and numbers and we so easily give up the subjective side of safety in favor of technical solutions, especially when pressure on production, schedule, cost and other organizational priorities is high.

Leadership That Comes From Anywhere and Everywhere

We refer to those who take on the challenge of *Incident and Injury-Free* work as “*Incident and Injury-Free* Leaders.” *Incident and Injury-Free* Leaders do not necessarily need to be in positions of authority in order to make a profound difference in eliminating injury in the workplace. *Incident and Injury-Free* Leadership can come from anywhere in the organization. This idea that leadership can come from anywhere is at odds with the way many of us use the word “leadership” in everyday language. Typically, the leader is the person at the top of the organizational hierarchy. We assume “leadership” refers only to those people in positions of authority; those to whom we report. However, to be more precise and consistent with the thinking of Harvard business professor Dr. John Kotter, JMJ uses the term “management” when referring to those in positions of organizational authority and thus draws a sharp distinction between “management” and “leadership.” This reserves the role of “leadership,” as Kotterⁱⁱ recommends, for those who are creating change, for setting direction and for enrolling people in new possibilities.

Management is about dealing with complexity, control and performance; *Leadership* is about causing something to happen that was not going to happen anyway. From this point of view, a manager might be an effective leader, or he might not. The distinction makes one thing perfectly clear; you do not have to be a manager to be a leader. Moreover, this point is critical for creating and sustaining an *Incident and Injury-Free* workplace. Leadership must be able to come from anywhere and it must ultimately come from everywhere.

“**Management is about dealing with complexity, control and performance; Leadership is about causing something to happen that was not going to happen anyway.**”

Another way of making this point is that an *Incident and Injury-Free* approach must have both “Top Down” (people in positions of authority, i.e., managers) and “Bottom Up” (grassroots leadership from all sectors of the workforce) leadership in order to take root and produce sustainable, enduring results. Grassroots leadership by itself is insufficient. If managers are not enrolled in causing *Incident and Injury-Free* results, they can both consciously and unconsciously undermine the grassroots leadership. Top Down leadership by itself is also insufficient because people throughout the organization must fully own and actively participate in the effort. In the current business climate where CEOs, top and middle managers change with increasing frequency, the *Incident and Injury-Free* approach must be so ingrained and embedded in the organization that it is able to survive the shifting winds of new business concepts and changing corporate priorities and structures.

Leaders Believe That *Incident and Injury-Free* Results are Possible

On the surface, believing *Incident and Injury-Free* results are possible might seem simple to do, but there is much more to holding such a belief than first meets the eye. For anyone who takes the “no kidding” aspect of the *Incident and Injury-Free* approach seriously, there is an inevitable confrontation with other existing beliefs.

What is meant by “believe” in this context anyway? Are we talking about some kind of blind faith where people must throw out all sound judgment and critical reflection? No, to the contrary, both sound judgment and critical reflection are keys to confronting the basic questions about making an *Incident and Injury-Free* workplace. A simplistic and unexamined belief that *Incident and Injury-Free* results are possible will not, by itself, produce an *Incident and Injury-Free* workplace.

This question about how *Incident and Injury-Free* results might be possible is closely connected with the concept of authentic safety leadership. *Incident and Injury-Free* Leaders actively engage others in the question of what it takes to be an *Incident and Injury-Free* workplace, not in order to persuade others to believe as they do, but that they might also develop their own answers for how to create *Incident and Injury-Free* results.

Although the question of whether *Incident and Injury-Free* performance is possible sounds deeply philosophical, it is really not difficult to see that it is also a fundamental and highly practical question. It is practical because we want

to improve results in our safety performance. It is also philosophical because if we want to eliminate all incidents and injuries from our workplace, we must confront how our thinking prevents us from getting the desired breakthroughs in safety performance (and perhaps how it prevents breakthroughs in other areas of performance as well)!

Before we address that, we must first address one of the critical characteristics of JMJ’s consulting practice. We have found it helpful to think of organizations as networks of conversations and the highly complex and differentiated conversations we have in the workplace are what create variances in actions and results. In a very real sense, we create our organizational realities through the conversations we have, day in and day outⁱⁱⁱ. From this point of view, it soon becomes apparent that many of us in the workplace do not always know what conversation we are in, or if we do, how to change it. Therefore, in our safety consulting practice, we often work with our clients to build *conversational competency*, creating clarity about what conversation is needed to produce the desired result.

In the domain of safety, we have found people often get stuck when they do not distinguish between conversations for *possibility* and conversations for *probability*, two vastly different conversations that produce vastly different results. For those of us who are trained in the western scientific paradigm, conversations for probability, which are designed to predict the future based on what as occurred in the past, are our “native” language. If we speak the language of *possibility* at all, a conversation that is discontinuous from the past, we often do so in a faltering and stammering way.

Conversations for *probability* have proven highly successful over the past 200 years throughout the industrial and technical revolutions by helping to manage and improve our quality of life many times over. The language of probability, based on the principles of scientific thinking, has become one of the dominant conversations in our modern workplace, producing gains in productivity, quality and overall effectiveness.

Although scientific thinking is powerful and effective in many ways, using the language of probability to achieve *Incident and Injury-Free* results is as hopeless as efforts to resolve an ancient puzzle, concocted in about 400 B.C. by the philosopher Xeno. Xeno claimed that it was impossible to shoot an arrow and actually hit a target because, in order to do so, the arrow must first go half the distance to the target. However, before it could go half the distance, it must first go *half of half* the distance and so on. Thus, the arrow could

never reach the target because it could never get started! Using the language of probability to achieve *Incident and Injury-Free* performance has the same chance of success as solving Xeno's famous paradox. *Incident and Injury-Free* results cannot be grasped through incremental steps.

The conversation for possibility is a different language, which transforms our thinking with open-ended questions. Leaders who understand and use conversations for possibility know there is a language only accessed subjectively, through personal reflection and inquiry, and through acts of courage and creation. In order for the language of possibility to flourish, leaders temporarily suspend their use of the language of probability. The two languages are not in the end incompatible, but they cannot occur simultaneously. The language of probability owns the mind and the language of possibility owns the heart; once the heart has embraced what is possible, the mind will never see things the same again.

Incident and Injury-Free Leadership is an Act of Courage

In workplaces all over the world, people are discovering the possibility of *Incident and Injury-Free* performance. In an environment where cost, schedule, productivity and profit are critical to organizational and individual success, these champions are speaking their commitment to "nobody getting hurt and everyone going home safely," while at the same time, making their companies more productive and profitable. To create this accomplishment in the face of what seems like an impossible paradox requires great courage.

Incident and Injury-Free Leaders demonstrate their courage by speaking what they know is possible, even when those around them speak the language of the probable, the improbable and the impossible.

Being courageous does not mean an absence of fear. These *Incident and Injury-Free* Leaders experience fear, yet they go beyond fear, acting consistently with what they know is right. They push forward into new areas where they do not have the answers, where the easy answers are not really answers at all.

For many of us who grew up in traditional work environments, it does not seem wise to admit when you do not know something, or that you are nervous or fearful about doing something perceived to be unsafe or dangerous. It can seem better to "look good" and do what has to be done, "faking it until you make it," no matter how dangerous the consequences of such a course of action might be.

At Sears, Ralph demonstrated courage when he said not to lift the television alone. He took a risk of rejection by saying what he did. Some people (especially men!) might be offended by his implication that, "The job couldn't be handled by one strong person." Ralph was more concerned about Rick's safety than protecting his ego, one example of a key attribute of individual courage for *Incident and Injury-Free* Leadership.

Incident and Injury-Free Leaders demonstrate this same kind of courage in the face of organizational breakdowns, shifts in priorities and enormous production pressure. They take a stand for *Incident and Injury-Free* results, even when they do not know how it will turn out. For example, a foreman on a large construction project felt the pressure of a slipping schedule resulting from extreme weather conditions. When the weather improved, management demanded the foreman's crew work repetitive 12-hour shifts to make up for lost time. After the third day of these extended shifts, the foreman realized he was putting his crew at risk due to fatigue and called for an immediate meeting with his safety leadership team, which included his immediate management team. In the meeting, the foreman reported he saw many signs that the safety of his crew was at risk. He declared the decision to overwork the crew through extended shifts was inconsistent with the organizational commitment to nobody getting hurt. He said he could not and would not, continue to put his people's safety at risk.

The courage the foreman exhibited by speaking up for the safety of his crew was received well by the safety leadership team because of its own commitment to *Incident and Injury-Free* performance. The team took on the task of resolving the productivity and schedule demands of the project without compromising the integrity of the organizational commitment to *Incident and Injury-Free* performance. The competing drivers for schedule and production, the lapses in commitment, the paradoxes, and the contradicting messages in the workplace are facts of life. It takes acts of courage by leaders, the foreman in this example, to interrupt "business as usual" and return the organization to integrity in its commitment to the safety of the workforce. When leaders do not step into these organizational integrity gaps, the result is a rapid decay in mutual trust, appreciation and teamwork.

The *Incident and Injury-Free* Leader steps into the breach when others voluntarily or thoughtlessly put people at risk. It is this kind of courage which makes *Incident and Injury-Free* results possible.

Incident and Injury-Free Leadership Connects to Core Values

By definition, the language of *probability* is objective, detached and attempts to be value-neutral. The language of *possibility* and the *Incident and Injury-Free* approach are quite different. The *Incident and Injury-Free* approach is value-based and does not try to be objective, neutral or detached. When people are at risk and their lives are at stake, it is critical to lead and act spontaneously from one's deepest concern. *Incident and Injury-Free* Leaders act from their deeply held core values and they encourage others to do the same. *Incident and Injury-Free* Leaders understand that it is through such mutual concern and action that an *Incident and Injury-Free* culture begins to take root in the organization.

Many organizational theorists have noted the connection between values and culture. Both Edgar Schein^{iv} and Karl Weick^v hold one of the most commonly cited views of culture. Culture is a set of assumptions that preserve lessons learned from dealing with past challenges, confirmative values derived from those assumptions that prescribe how the people should act, and artifacts and symbols that embody those values and give them substance. Since values are at the core of what makes cultures successful or unsuccessful, it is not possible, according to Schein, to create lasting change without working with people at the level of values and beliefs.

Therefore, cultures that embrace *Incident and Injury-Free* results are full of leaders who relate to *Incident and Injury-Free* work as a core value, who reinforce shared values that protect people from harm and who behave in ways consistent with those values.

Researcher James T. Reason^{vi}, said about *positive* safety cultures, "The safety culture of an organization is the product of individual and group values, attitudes, competencies, and patterns of behaviour that determine the commitment to, and the style and proficiency of an organization's health and safety programmes. Organizations with a *positive* safety culture are characterized by communications founded on mutual trust, by shared perceptions of the importance of safety, and by confidence in the efficacy of preventative measures."^{vii}

Incident and Injury-Free Leaders, therefore, learn to navigate skillfully through the delicate waters of values and culture, the so-called "soft" side of business. Savvy leaders recognize the *soft* side is *hard* work. Most business and engineering programs do not have courses in "relationship management," "trust and integrity," "values," and "emotional intelligence;" however, these topics are finding their way into

many corporate boardrooms, factory floor workshops and construction jobsites. What is all this interest in the soft side about and what does it have to do with eliminating injuries?

At JMJ, we call this critical soft side in business the "subjective" side. We like to think of it not as the *opposite* of the objective world, but as the *inside* of it. For example, when researchers want to study the electrical activity of the human brain, they can hook it up to a machine and measure it. However, if they want to know how the person feels when they are being hooked up to the machine, they must ask the person. The subjective and objective approaches are actually accessing the same phenomena, but from the inside or from the outside. Just as the palm of the hand is not opposed to the back of the hand the subjective approach is also not separate from the objective, measurable world of business. The subjective and objective, the inside and outside, are part of the same whole system. We refer to this combined view as the integral approach, a model shown below as Exhibit 2, which we have adapted from scholar Ken Wilber^{viii}. The meaning of integral is "whole," and Wilber's insight was to pull together many partial and incomplete views of reality into one comprehensive theory. Therefore, the world of objective facts is not complete without also taking into account the world of subjective feelings, moods, values and intentions. The world of individuals is not complete without considering them within groups and social arrangements. The world of structures and systems is a partial picture, unless we consider it together with subjective elements, including culture, language, meaning and ideas of justice.

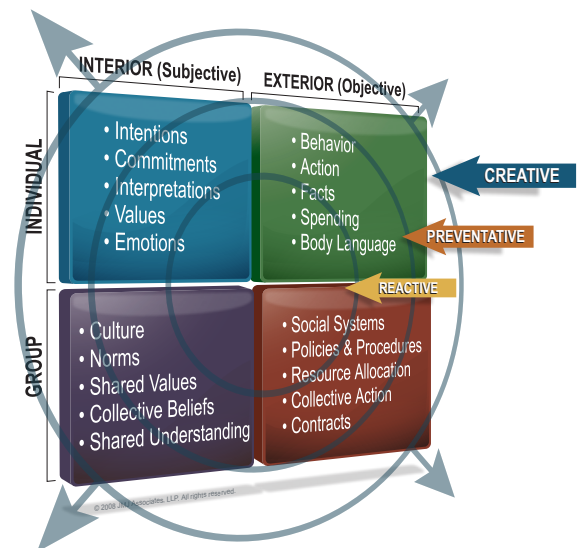


Exhibit 1. The Integral Model

While it is not essential to have a deep understanding of the integral approach in order to be effective, *Incident and Injury-Free Leaders* must be conversant with the subjective worlds of intentions, purposes, values and culture. *Incident and Injury-Free Leaders* understand intuitively that the subjective world is not in conflict with the worlds of measurement, facts, systems and performance. Rather, these two worlds are mutually supportive; they are each facets of the one real world we live and work in.

Therefore, *Incident and Injury-Free Leaders* do not undermine existing rules and procedures; they bring them to life. In the typical safety audit, for example, organizational systems are examined against a particular standard (OSHA, internal policies, best practices, etc.) Gaps and required corrective actions are identified. The best safety audits attempt to examine subjective issues such as level of management commitment. They look for the visible signs of management's safety commitment, such as a safety policy statement. Auditors may interview workers to test their understanding of and compliance with the established safety policy. Where a safety policy does not exist, the recommended corrective action is typically to develop and publicize one. Where worker understanding and compliance does not match the established safety policy, the typical recommended corrective action is to train people on the policy and observe worker compliance.

One Fortune 50 Company decided to conduct a safety audit based on the Integral Model (subjective and objective). In conjunction with a traditional systems-based safety audit approach, interviews were conducted with a cross section of people throughout the organization in order to reveal the perceptions of safety commitment and leadership held by people and how those perceptions influenced their actions. The interviews revealed the workforce had an impressive commitment to compliance with safety rules and procedures (largely motivated from a fear of termination for non-compliance). What was revealed from the audit was no one was willing to "stick their neck out" or be a leader for safety simply to keep people from getting hurt. There was no technical corrective action to recommend fixing this. The solution to this challenge to move beyond fear-motivated compliance required an adaptive approach that involved creating leaders for *Incident and Injury-Free* results throughout the organization.

Incident and Injury-Free Leaders take Increasing Responsibility

In order for an *Incident and Injury-Free* workplace to become a reality, leaders go beyond seeing themselves as prisoners of circumstances. Each and every one of us is

susceptible to falling prey to what might be called "victim mentality" at one time or another. When this happens, we often do not see the key to our liberation is held tightly in the grip of our own hands. Leaders for Incident and Injury-Free know the key to individual responsibility, the antidote to victim mentality, is the power of choice.

In the "victim mentality" mindset, we put responsibility for the success or failure of our safety performance in the hands of others, or perhaps, "fate." *Incident and Injury-Free Leaders* have learned something from which we can all benefit; no matter what happens. Irrespective of whether events are beyond their control, how they choose to respond is a matter of personal choice and is within their control. This realization is the beginning of what it means to be responsible and it is critical for the development of an *Incident and Injury-Free* workplace.

At times, when we talk about responsibility, we immediately begin to think about blame. When talking about people's lives, nobody wants to be responsible if it also means they are also assuming blame!

One definition of the word responsible does refer to blame. For example, if you rob a bank, or even just drive the getaway car, you are responsible (i.e., to blame) for the act of robbing the bank and consequences stemming from what you did, whether or not you think you are. If you get caught, you will be held responsible and you will pay the price for what you did. This is the fundamental societal meaning of justice in the Western world, where people are held responsible for what they do or do not do.

However, there is another way of being responsible which has nothing to do with blame; it is the kind of responsibility that is relevant to *Incident and Injury-Free Leadership*. When we are responsible in *this* way, we are exercising our human power to choose how we will respond to what happens in life, no matter how challenging or difficult this might be. This way of emphasizing choice directly challenges the traditional behaviorist's notion of human life, which asserts behavior is nothing more than a conditioned response to a given stimulus. Many current approaches to safety are based on this rather limited view of human life where people are motivated solely by external rewards and punishments. In contrast, JMJ asserts people are defined by the choices they make, choices that unleash possibilities that could not have been predicted.

This notion of human responsibility asserts that *between* stimulus and response is a *choice*. Even if the gap is very small, it is still enough to create a future that would

not have happened if we had not exercised our free will. Moreover, it is making a choice that has everything to do with the *Incident and Injury-Free* commitment.

Without personal responsibility and choice, we are left with a mechanistic world of cause and effect, a deterministic fate where people *must* inevitably get hurt or killed because they have always been hurt or killed in the past. Nevertheless, such a world is escapable. It is only when we relinquish our ability to choose that injuries and deaths appear inevitable.

As philosopher and business consultant Peter Koestenbaum^{ix} put it, "Determinism is ... philosophical suicide. Our last free act - after which no further free acts are possible - is to deny that we are free. This process is the mechanism of dehumanization and the dynamics of personalization. Because of the pervasiveness of this denial of freedom, we live in an age of alienation, an age that cannot manage its freedom-induced anxiety."

These are profound and deep ideas, but their core message is simple. As humans, we are free to choose and our failure to choose is what has us feeling like victims in life. In the world of safety, this means that if we resign ourselves to the idea that injuries and deaths in the workplace are inevitable, we give up that which makes us human and we all suffer as a result.

Incident and Injury-Free Leaders are responsible for creating an *Incident and Injury-Free* workplace. They do not abdicate this responsibility to other people, to science or to fate. They know there are many things outside of their control and they accept this condition for what it is. At the same time, however, they expand their reach to take on more and more, being responsible for that which seemed impossible to them in the past.

As an example, a large construction management firm began their journey towards an *Incident and Injury-Free* culture by declaring all their employees on a specific jobsite would work in an *Incident and Injury-Free* manner. After some time, however, this site-specific declaration seemed insufficient when they considered all of their other employees worldwide who faced extreme risks on their projects. The CEO of this company, as an *Incident and Injury-Free* Leader himself, challenged his executive team to take on the challenge and commitment so that all of their organization's employees could work in an *Incident and Injury-Free* way. After many more months, the challenge grew deeper as the firm's executive leadership team extended their *Incident and Injury-Free* commitment beyond their own employees, to the much

larger group of subcontractor employees who worked on their projects. It became unacceptable to this leadership team to ignore this large group of workers because of their status of working as subcontractors. One might think that their sphere of responsibility in this matter had gone far enough by taking responsibility for their own employees alone, but not for this group of *Incident and Injury-Free* Leaders.

Usually, if we take responsibility this far, it is that for which we are accountable. In other words, one's accountabilities come with the role or job and are written into the job's specifications or requirements. From this point of view, safety is the accountability of the safety professionals, and we all hope they will also take responsibility for carrying out their duties. The example above shows that it is possible to take responsibility far beyond that for which we are typically held accountable. By so doing, we create profoundly positive consequences. Two years after the construction management firm discussed in the earlier example began their journey to be an *Incident and Injury-Free* organization, they came to the conclusion that several of the large commercial properties they operated through a subsidiary company posed risks for people who visited those properties. These risks were inconsistent with the organizational commitment to the elimination of injuries. The sphere of their responsibility was thus extended to include hundreds of thousands of people who visit these properties annually - all out of their commitment to operate their sites and businesses without incidents or injuries!

Did they have to do this? Absolutely not. This is an example of great *Incident and Injury-Free* Leadership and the choice they made as a result of the possibility conversation created within this organization, which continually expands the net of the *Incident and Injury-Free* approach to include situations far beyond what we would normally expect.

In typical work situations, this means people not only take responsibility for their own safety, but they also take responsibility for their co-workers and others. It might mean watching out for other people in one's work crew, another work crew, perhaps another business unit, or even a competitor.

How did our friend at Sears, Ralph, measure up as a leader of *Incident and Injury-Free* work? Considering we have set the bar fairly high, we think Ralph is doing very well. He is certainly on the journey toward becoming an *Incident and Injury-Free* Leader. As we said earlier, he showed courage by taking a stand for his customer's safety, even though it could have created an awkward moment. Beyond this, it is difficult

to tell how deep his belief in *Incident and Injury-Free* results might go, since Rick's conversation with Ralph did not go into depth about these things. It has been a key point throughout this essay that you cannot really know what you need to know about a person unless you engage them in conversation and inquiry. Further, unless you engage people in the subjective side of safety, as well as the objective, measurable side, you cannot have mature *Incident and Injury-Free* Leadership.

Incident and Injury-Free is a Journey, not a Destination

For most people, this is a lot to chew. For those who are still struggling to shed the victim role, it is enough to take full responsibility for their own safety, let alone their distant neighbor. For many who take on the journey, they realize after one level is achieved, it is challenging to explore what it would mean to take responsibility out to the next level. For many, the second level of their *Incident and Injury-Free* journey is to take it home so it touches their families and loved ones.

An engineer for a large construction firm speaks with pride about the emphasis on safety his company has had for decades. He relates this has impacted his family and work at home. One day after work, he was at home remodeling his kitchen. He was using a power tool to chip away the old tile and was wearing his safety glasses, but not his earplugs. His 9-year-old daughter came into the kitchen and asked, "Daddy, that is really noisy! Where are your ear plugs?" He said, "Not now honey, Daddy's busy." His daughter went to the garage and brought back earplugs and said, "Daddy, please wear these!" He realized at that moment how far his responsibility for safety had reached into his family, even at a moment when his own actions were not consistent with his commitment. By bringing home a high level of responsibility around safety from work, he had transferred a similar level of responsibility for safety to his daughter. He had created a 9-year-old *Incident and Injury-Free* Leader.

In JMJ's practice, we draw a sharp distinction between zero as a goal and the *Incident and Injury-Free* journey, because we are sensitive to the dehumanizing effects of measurement. Please measure, but don't make an *Incident and Injury-Free* journey about the numbers!

A key reason not to promote zero as a goal is because of the danger of achieving it and then assuming that the journey is over. That would be a serious mistake. What we have learned from some of our best clients is when certain groups really do reach their goals and no one is getting hurt, they

do not stop their *Incident and Injury-Free* approach, they deepen it. They begin to ask, "What's on the other side of zero?" and, "Might there be other ways that we hurt people besides physical injury?" This inquiry into the "other side of zero" is the natural step for leaders who are authentically on the journey to create *Incident and Injury-Free* work.

Conclusion

The *Incident and Injury-Free* approach is about *people and relationships*, not numbers, not even the number zero. It is a language of *possibility* that knows no bounds. It is an act of *courage* that steps out beyond fear and self imposed limitations. *Incident and Injury-Free* Leadership is grounded in core values such as dignity, trust and freedom. It is a journey that never ends, as long as the human spirit reaches out into the future, full of passion and possibility.

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