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The Problems Associated with Perfect Goals and Perfect Results - Part 2

Article by Alan D Quilley CRSP (held from 1985-2021)

In our last newsletter, 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 possessions 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

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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 spill 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 queen contestant 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.

In Conclusion

So there you have it...Zero Harm/Injuries/Accidents sounds good...it 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 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.

Alan D. Quilley (1954-2021), my late husband, was a proud CRSP, published author, spent over 4 decades working in OHS, and since 2003, was a highly successful OH&S consultant and trainer/mentor. In determining the direction of our newsletter, I will be including Alan's past articles as they are virtually timeless.

Online CRST Examination Preparation

Safety Results Ltd, in conjunction with Lambton College based in Sarnia, Ontario, brings you THE best online CRST Examination Preparation Workshop!

The next course starts July 4/23 and concludes July 31/23. Registrations for this course will be accepted by Lambton College until 4:00PM EDT, July 7/23.

When researching methods to deliver this top-notch course, we were expressly interested in associating with a distinguished educational institution as opposed to unknown online entities. It was vitally important that we aligned ourselves with an institution that believes in the same degree of ethics, high attention to service, content and quality as we do. Established in 1966, Lambton College has the enviable reputation as a pioneer in Mobile Learning. They are a global leader in applied research, education and innovation. Their work in a

number of fields continues to exceed expectations, which makes them a perfect fit for what we do. The aim of this course is to assist in performing your own knowledge gap analysis and then create a study plan which will enable you to focus on the competencies that you need to master before the exam. To review and register in this online course, please click [here](#). (Registrations are handled exclusively by Lambton College)

Exclusive to Lambton College students confirmed in this course, the study material that the course was built upon is available at a special student discounted rate of \$269.00 CAD plus applicable taxes. Shipping (within Canada only) is included. More details [here](#).

Compliments for our CRSP/CRST Study Material and Virtual Coaching Packages

"Just wanted to let you know that I wrote my CRSP exam. I used your study materials to prepare, and successfully passed the exam. I found the material a great help".

"I took the CRSP in February; it was my first write and I was successful. Your study material definitely helped".

"I am happy to say that I was successful in passing the CRSP exam. I do think that your books provided me with much of the information required to be successful in the exam. I did very well and I do attribute much of it to your study material".

"I just received my confirmation letter and I was successful! So relieved and happy!"

"I just wanted to let you know that I passed the CRSP this February and just received the results in the mail, Thursday. Thank you!"

"The material was exceptionally helpful and certainly worth the price; many thanks for your help!"



CRSP AND CRST VIRTUAL COACHING EXAMINATION PREPARATION

As it has always been our commitment to help candidates with their studies for both the [CRSPEX](#) and the [CRSTEX](#), we are continuing our *Virtual Coaching Packages*. These packages are currently available to those that are writing the 2019 Blueprint CRSTEX and the 2020 Blueprint CRSPEX.

We will provide all of the material (shipped at our cost within Canada only). We are also delighted to offer generous discounts to current members in good standing of the CSSE and WOHSS (not combinable). For more information on those discounts, please contact [Marie](#).

This virtual package includes 6 hours of personal coaching with Greg McInnes CRSP. The hours are broken down however you wish. There will be homework assignments between the calls. Calls are individualized and held via phone or Zoom Video Conference, your choice. Packages must be used within 6 months of purchase.

"It's really important to know who is trying to teach you something". - Alan D Quilley CRSP

Who is your Coach?

Greg McInnes, CRSP is our instructor and can teach you how to study to help you in being successful in your journey to certification. He is a respected leader in OH&S, having over 30 years' experience in the field in OH&S management positions (civic government, healthcare, aerospace, oil and gas and utilities). Greg has also been a member of the Board of Governors for BCRSP and held positions with CSSE at both the local, provincial and national levels.

He is a working CRSP who consults to industry helping them create and implement their Health and Safety program. Greg has developed and instructed adult OHS education programs at the University of Alberta and has co-instructed at NAIT along with instructing OHS courses for varying companies. With all his experience, and sharing our techniques to help you focus your studies, why look elsewhere? When selecting your mentor, take the time to research who other providers are. We believe that they simply won't measure up with us in terms of quality, experience and teaching style.

"There are no hard questions if you know the answers". - Alan D Quilley CRSP

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