SIX STEPS TO CHANGING YOUR COMPANY’S SAFETY CULTURE
(Through the story of a man who’s been there)
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Few things are harder than changing a company’s culture. Years of engrained beliefs and behaviors can make it seem impossible especially when you’re dealing with employees who have been at their jobs for a long time and have seen management mandates come and go.

BNSF Railway is one such company. One of the world’s largest freight railways, BNSF has over

40,000 employees

operating 32,000 miles of track in North America.

The work is 24 hours a day,

365 days a year.

It’s not exactly the recipe for easy change.

However, BNSF did it. Here the former head of operations at the railway, Greg Fox, explains how and what you can learn from the process to install a change of safety culture in your own business.
You must accept that the status quo is unacceptable

“About a decade ago, we were focused on behavior-based safety,” Fox says. “We were making progress in terms of just reducing the number of reportable incidents. But we were still unfortunately – tragically – still experiencing loss of life and serious life-altering injuries and it just wasn’t acceptable. That was the trigger moment. Any loss of life is unacceptable.”

So, Greg Fox says, BNSF looked outside to change itself inside.

“We went to work then on working with BST at that time, now DEKRA, to really understand how to change the culture,” he says. “It wasn’t just about process safety. It was also the leadership and the safety culture in which those processes were executed that ultimately proved to be the secret sauce, if you will.”
Be patient (true change takes time)

Like all great leaders, Fox was anxious to improve things and do it quickly. However, he says, changing a culture is something that takes time.

“It takes a lot of patience,” Fox says, “incredible patience, to change the culture because you’re dealing with people and, in many cases, people who’ve been around for, you know, 30 years in the industry and they’ve seen safety programs come and go.”

“It takes three years to change a climate,” he continues, “six, seven years to change a culture and I believe that in my heart. In this case you’re talking about people, changing perspectives, mindsets, experiences. It takes a long time.”

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After DEKRA helped BNSF identify its culture pressure points, one of the first places the railway looked to install their safety change was in rule compliance.

“And what we found is we weren’t consistent in how our employees were following the rules and, frankly, how we were assessing exceptions to the rules in terms of discipline,” Fox continued. “So we focused on a set of critical skills – life-altering, critical skills and rules – and we held people accountable. And then we challenged ourselves around procedural justice insuring that we were treating people equally.”

“In many cases,” he says, “following the rules are the difference-makers for someone going home to their family at the end of the work day.”
Make sure your leaders stay on message

From there, Fox says it was important the company made sure its leaders were consistent with messaging and focus.

“Leaders set the culture. Culture determines behavior. Safe behavior gets people home at the end of the day,” he explains.

“It’s all about consistent execution year-in and year-out: consistency of the messaging, consistency of the program reinforcing previous year learnings.” Fox says. “And I think through that process, over time, you start building a level of trust in the organization. People see that, “OK, they’re serious about this. This is not the program de jour that we’ve seen in the past.””
Involve your informal safety leaders

If there’s one thing Fox wishes he had done differently it is inviting the company’s informal safety leaders into this cultural change initiative.

“We should have involved our craft leaders earlier in that process. We would have accelerated I think the change had we done that.”

Fox says they would have become brand ambassadors for change earlier.

“Hindsight’s always 20/20 but bringing the craft employees – especially the informal safety leaders – in sooner would have been helpful.”
Encourage people to take care of their co-workers

Fox says the final step to changing the safety culture at BNSF was promoting the idea that safety compliance had to turn into a safety commitment.

“A culture of commitment is best described as people taking accountability for their own safety but also looking out for their co-workers, being able to approach others – being willing to approach others – when they see their co-workers putting themselves at risk,” he explains.

The end result of all this effort, Fox says, was safety at BNSF changing from a “push” type of situation to a “pull” where the employees and labor unions became the driving force for safety improvements.

“As we made that shift employee engagement increased,” Fox says. “We put in place a program called “APPROACHING OTHERS” which was, you know, a very simple concept:

If you care about somebody, you’d be willing to approach them when you see them putting themselves at risk. If you care about somebody you’ll also hopefully recognize safe behavior so it’s reinforced in the future.”
A look at BNSF’s injury statistics over this time period shows the results of this change in safety culture:

BNSF’s Reportable Injury Frequency Ratio. The Rail Industry ‘Reportable Frequency Ratio’ is based on FRA (Federal Railroad Administration ~ the Rail Industry safety regulator) reportability requirements. FRA Reportable criteria very similar to OSHA criteria. Ratio based on ‘Reportable Injuries per 200,000 man-hours’.

### 10-YEAR PERIOD OF OUR SAFETY CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION:

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<th>Year</th>
<th>FRA Reportable Frequency Ratio</th>
<th>Total FRA Reportable Injuries</th>
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<td>612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>0.95</td>
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### APPROACHING OTHERS STARTED IN 2013

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<th>Year</th>
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<td>475</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
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Fox says it’s important to remember there’s not “one-size-fits-all” to truly change a company’s culture. He credits the in-depth assessments BNSF got from DEKRA in helping the company identify their specific path to alter things. And, he says, your safety culture can only change if your company’s values change.

“Priorities can change over time but a value is something that is deeply held.”

Fox explains. “It’s lasting. It’s enduring. Safety’s now a value [at BNSF]. Nothing we do at the railroad is more important than the safety of our employees and people getting home to their families.”

Greg Fox has 30+ years of experience in the railway industry. In September of 2016, he retired as the Executive Vice President of Operations for BNSF Railroad. Greg’s team was responsible for the safety and engagement of all employees. They implemented a Safety Cultural Transformation Initiative that achieved the company’s best-ever employee safety & a reduction in Reportable Employee Injuries of over 60%.
Want to learn more? Visit us today!

This e-book is intended as a general introduction to and overview of each of these six critical topics. Our professionals are proven experts and thought leaders in developing comprehensive safety and reliability solutions for our clients, and delivering cutting-edge programs for safety excellence. For more in-depth information on any or all of these topics, please visit us at www.dekra-insight.com and talk to us about how the right safety and reliability solutions can make your organization’s 2017 a smarter and safer one.