



## GREAT LEADERSHIP IN SAFETY

by

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So often we hear the phrase ‘leaders need to walk the talk’ when it comes to safety in workplaces. Equally as often some of us learn, often in hindsight after an avoidable incident has occurred, that leadership’s rhetoric is not matched by their actions.

Are your leaders the people you see at the top of the organization? The answer is, quite simply, no. Whilst some organizations identify their leaders by their position in the organization’s hierarchy, what many lose sight of is “that leaders exist at every level. Leadership is not about power. Leadership is about vision and inspiration.”<sup>1</sup> Many organizations advocate that only their designated leaders know (best) what and how to improve when it comes to health and safety. Leaders may have the positional power to make a positive difference, to allocate funds for improved health and safety, to ensure continual improvement. However, so too does everyone in the organization have the power of choice – everyone can advocate for change, improve health and safety in their sphere of influence, eliminate hazards where possible and also manage risks where they cannot remove hazards completely. As each person steps forward to be a leader in health and safety, so too will the organization begin to change and grow, for the betterment of all workers.

Now let’s look at what distinguishes a ‘leader’ from a ‘great leader’ and why is *great leadership* so essential for effective workplace health and safety outcomes?

“Having leadership ability is all about giving quality guidance, direction, support and advice. Leaders have the innate ability to inspire others without even knowing they are doing it.....Leaders are all around us, quietly getting on with achieving, without fuss and bother, without loud acclamations.”<sup>2</sup> *Great leadership* is, however, a strong and selfless step beyond

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<sup>1</sup> [No Boxing Allowed](#), Nola A. Hennessy, August 2009, p.111

<sup>2</sup> [Ibid.](#), p. 107

simply leading. Whilst a full list of great leadership characteristics and behaviors can be found in [No Boxing Allowed](#) the following list is particularly relevant to workplace health and safety, and the achievement of positive outcomes:

Great Leaders<sup>3</sup>:

- “empower others with relevant information...
- walk the talk, consistently
- never just promise, they act....
- demonstrate by actions, not just by words, that people are the most important asset on earth
- demonstrate care for people’s health, safety and wellbeing
- when leading organizations, have people policies in place that reflect and ensure that an honest, communicative, safe, caring and just culture is the solid foundation for the organization
- actively listen, all the time....
- provide clear direction....
- empower others to have a say, to stand up for any perceived injustice, to challenge and query decisions made....
- stay positive, through even the worst adversity
- forgive
- stay focused on long term outcomes for the good of all humans
- never seek an outcome for themselves alone – they don’t have an “It’s all about me” attitude or push a purely personal agenda....
- say sorry when they realize they have done something wrong”.

Great leaders must make clear their organizational goal for injury prevention. They must make the right strategic choices that aim to (i) minimize competing goals, (ii) lessen organizational conflict and (iii) create a positive flow-on effect in the way the organization manages safety day to day.

“Regardless of where you are at in your leadership journey, whether you think you were born with leadership ability or not, it is vitally important that you feel empowered to exercise all your leadership abilities..”<sup>4</sup> Your choice to develop to become a great leader is always that, your choice.

And remember, “when we step forward to make things better, huge resistance can face us”<sup>5</sup>. Change for the better is also a choice. It may come at a price, but better that it not come at the price of people’s health and safety.

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<sup>3</sup> [Ibid](#), pp 107- 109

<sup>4</sup> [Ibid](#), p. 112

<sup>5</sup> [Ibid](#), p.9

