Lessons from the ashes: The critical role of leadership in promoting safety

Robert L. Sumwalt, III
Accident aircraft prior to N-number change to N777VG.
Left wing at edge of tree line
• Pilot did not refer to, or comply with, Abnormal Procedure.

• With anti-skid failure, the required landing distance exceed the available runway length at Thomson.
Accidents Involve Many Factors

- Errors by Individuals
- Organizational Factors
Teterboro, NJ
February 2005
Accidents Involve Many Factors

Errors by Individuals

Organizational Factors
“Norfolk Southern Railway Company’s inadequate rail inspection and maintenance program ...”
“... Amtrak’s failure to ensure that the engineer had the competency to correctly interpret signals across the different territories over which he operated...”
“Contributing to the accident [was] ... Colgan Air’s inadequate procedures for airspeed selection and management during approaches in icing conditions.”
“WMATA’s lack of a safety culture…”

“Ineffective oversight by WMATA Board of Directors”
Goodwell, OK
June 2012

“Union Pacific Railroad failed to adhere to its policy ...”
“Scaled Composites fail[ed] to consider and protect against the possibility that a single human error could result in a catastrophic hazard to the SpaceShipTwo vehicle.”
“Contributing to the accident was an organizational culture that prioritized mission execution over aviation safety...”
Talkeetna, AK
March 2013
“Also causal was the Alaska Department of Public Safety’s punitive culture and inadequate safety management, which prevented the organization from identifying and correcting latent deficiencies in risk management and pilot training.”
“Gulfstream’s focus on meeting the G650’s planned certification date caused schedule-related pressure that was not adequately counterbalanced by robust organizational processes to prevent, identify, and correct the company’s key engineering oversight errors.”
Gulfstream Managers Blamed for Fatal Crash on Test Flight

by Alan Levin

October 11, 2012 — 12:00 AM EDT

Pressure to speed flight tests of a new model of General Dynamics Corp’s Gulfstream business jet so it could win U.S. certification for sale was blamed by a U.S. safety agency for a crash that killed four employees.

The National Transportation Safety Board yesterday ruled that Gulfstream management was responsible for the accident that sent a G650, which costs $65 million and has the longest range of any private aircraft, sliding off a Roswell, New Mexico, runway in flames on April 2, 2011.
Hardwood Manufacturer Managers Blamed for Fatal Accident

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“The best way to predict the future is to create it.”

- Peter Drucker
Creating a Future of Safety:
Four Leadership Questions

1. How strong is our safety culture?
2. Are we really living our values?
3. Are we fooling ourselves?
4. Are we measuring and rewarding the right things?
Creating a Future of Safety

HOW STRONG IS OUR SAFETY CULTURE?
Safety Culture is:

“Safety culture is the core values and behaviors resulting from a collective commitment by leaders and individuals to emphasize safety over competing goals to ensure protection of people and the environment.”

Source: U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Do you have a good safety culture?
Do you have a good safety culture?

• “… it is worth pointing out that if you are convinced that your organization has a good safety culture, you are almost certainly mistaken.”

• “… a safety culture is something that is striven for but rarely attained…”

• “… the process is more important than the product.”

- James Reason, “Managing the Risks of Organizational Accidents.”
Safety Culture is:

Triggered at the top

Measured at the bottom

Safety culture starts at the top of the organization and permeates the entire organization.
Sometimes the Message gets Distorted

Safety  Quality  Timeliness  Efficiency

Managers
Supervisors
Coworkers

MOST IMPORTANT - Output!!!!
Cut corners to save money
Fear of retribution
Unfair discipline
Work sucks
Call in sick for extra vacation day

Get job done at all costs
align·ment  noun  \ə-ˈlīn-mənt\  
Where the leaders and front line employees, and everyone in between, share and practice the same values.
How leaders influence safety

“The safety behaviors and attitudes of individuals are influenced by their perceptions and expectations about safety in their work environment, and they pattern their safety behaviors to meet demonstrated priorities of organizational leaders, regardless of stated policies.”

- Dov Zohar, as cited in NTSB accident report
Metro North management is committed to workplace safety and participates regularly in safety events.

NTSB questionnaire
n = 156
Management 25
Labor 131

Fully Disagree -3
Mostly Disagree -2
Somewhat Disagree -1
No Opinion 0
Somewhat Agree 1
Mostly Agree 2
Fully Agree 3

Track Labor 0.81
Line Management 0.77
Division Management 1.13
Senior Management 2.75
Management does not pressure staff to maintain service or operations, potentially at cost of safety.
Employee Comments

• “Sometimes I feel safety is priority one as long as it's convenient.”
• “Metro-North pays lip service to safety. On time performance & budgets take precedence over safety.”
• “The railroad only cares about the on-time performance.”
• “It’s all about on-time performance and safety rules are thrown out the window to keep on time performance. Management has no clue.”
We aspire to be:

- Most loved airline.
- Most flown airline.
- Most profitable airline in the world.

December 10, 2015
Southwest Airlines jet hits another aircraft at Bob Hope Airport; no injuries reported

December 20, 2015
WASHINGTON – Southwest Airlines agreed to pay a $2.8 million civil penalty to settle a lawsuit over maintenance of dozens of its Boeing 737 aircraft, the Justice Department announced Monday.

A Southwest Airlines jet lands Feb. 3, 2014, at Love Field in Dallas. (Photo: AP)

Southwest could still face $5.5 million in deferred penalties if the airline doesn’t enhance its oversight and control of other companies which perform maintenance on its aircraft.
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December 10, 2015
Creating a Future of Safety

ARE WE REALLY LIVING OUR VALUES?
Values

• Is safety the top priority of your organization?

• Don’t make it a priority – make it a core value.
Living the Values

• In a successful organization, everything you do is run through the filter of your core values to make sure you are being true to them.

• And, most importantly, you must live those values.
• As a leader, your role is to ensure that your organization has safety as a core value and then, most importantly, you do everything you can to live those values.
SURGEON GENERAL’S WARNING: Smoking Causes Lung Cancer, Heart Disease, Emphysema, And May Complicate Pregnancy.
CVS Stops Tobacco Sales

“The sale of tobacco products is inconsistent with our purpose – helping people on their path to better health.”

- Larry J. Merlo, CEO, CVS Health

This move will cost CVS an estimated $2 BILLION in revenue.
“This move is clearly in-line with their stated purpose and values, a move we don’t see often enough today in corporate America. Relying on a strong foundation of values is often what sets market leaders apart from the pack.”

- Michael Woody, Ph.D. for Fox Business
“Think of values as the core guiding principles that act as the foundation of your organization. These principles should guide every decision and serve as your fallback in times of uncertainty.”

- Michael Woody, Ph.D. for Fox Business
Feb 7, 2014
$66.44

Feb 5, 2016
$93.10

40% Increase
• Organizations with strong leaders are those organizations that ensure their values are aligned and lived throughout the organization.

• They do the right things by caring for the safety and health of their employees and customers.

• Because of their commitment to values and caring, they have greater potential to perform well financially.
• What are your values?
• Is safety and health of your employees and customers one of your values?
• Are you truly living your values?
Creating a Future of Safety

ARE WE FOOLING OURSELVES?
An Impressive Operation
An Impressive Operation

• Full time crew
• Impeccable maintenance
• High training standards
• Going above minimum standards
• Positive audit comments
Positive Audit Comments

• “The [Safety Management Systems (SMS)] of this operator is well-developed”
• “Best practices are consistently employed in all facets of the program”
• “Continuous SMS improvement is actively pursued”
• “The Flight Ops Manual is remarkably well-written and comprehensive”
• “Safety culture within the department is shared among all team members”
• “Open reporting of hazards is consistently encouraged by management”
• “Solid safety program, maturing nicely”
“You can fool the auditors, but never fool yourself.”

- John Fenton
And, fool the auditors, they did…

Gulfstream G-IV Crash
Bedford, MA
May 31, 2014
7 Fatalities
And, perhaps they even fooled themselves.
With good safety performance, people/organizations can easily become complacent.

Don’t ever believe that a lack of accidents means you are “safe.”

To counter this complacency, there must be a leadership obsession with continuous improvement.

- Courtesy of Jim Schultz
Are you on the right track?

“Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.”

- Will Rogers
Creating a Future of Safety

ARE WE MEASURING AND REWARDING THE RIGHT THINGS?
“We were geared towards using the on-time performance number as a metric. And the philosophy was if we can deliver trains on time, all of the supporting activity that we did, track maintenance, signal maintenance and rolling stock maintenance must be performing well if we can deliver that high degree of service reliability.”

-Metro North SVP Operations
What do you measure and reward?

- Are you measuring the right things?
- Are they the most appropriate predictors of catastrophic events?
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