



# The Executive Leading With **Safety<sup>®</sup>** **Approach**

Technical White Paper

## Executive Summary

Most executives are fully committed to safety, yet many struggle with walking the talk—demonstrating through words and actions the depth of their commitment. Executive Leading With Safety<sup>®</sup> Approach provides leaders with the tools and confidence to lead their organizations more effectively and to accelerate an organizational transformation toward a zero-injury culture.

There is a big difference between executives who say they support safety and those who demonstrate that support through their day-to-day actions. The first kind of executive might arouse curiosity but is in danger of losing credibility. The second wins converts. Many executives underestimate the impact of their words and actions on an employee's decision to go the extra mile to control exposures for themselves and those around them.

Executive Leading With Safety Approach includes an objective assessment of how others perceive leaders, including:

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The effectiveness of their leadership style

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Their knowledge

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How they build interactions

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Their use of safety-leadership best practices

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Individual and team coaching

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Their skill at safety coaching

The purpose is to help executives understand the impact of their own actions on both the organization's culture and the level of exposure accepted by employees. DEKRA consultants work with the executive team and individual leaders to answer such questions as:

- What are the cultural attributes of world-class safety companies?
- How do leadership and culture impact the level of safety performance?
- Is it true that almost every decision I make impacts safety?
- What are moments of safety transformation? How can we leverage them?
- How might our goals increase exposure and reduce safe decision-making?
- What more could we do to prevent serious injuries and fatalities (SIFs)?
- How effective are our systems at exposure control?
- Which unrecognized exposures could we and our employees face because of how our brains work?
- What does it take to get true employee engagement?
- Why do trained people with good equipment still take chances?

Executive Leading With Safety Approach helps executives strengthen their personal safety ethic in order to move the culture in a way that places an increasing value on safety. The logic flow goes like this: A change in safety leadership behavior creates a higher shared organizational value for safety, which motivates employees to help reduce exposure, resulting in fewer injuries and illnesses and lower costs.

Each Executive Leading With Safety engagement is unique, reflecting the organization, the individual objectives, and the level of safety understanding of the leadership circle. The purpose of the engagement is not to make executives safety professionals. Rather, it is to give each executive the expertise and skills to lead the organization and the culture toward continuously improving safety performance.

Each engagement includes some or all of these four elements:

1. Individual safety leadership assessment
2. Team working sessions
3. Individual coaching
4. Effective safety governance

## **A. Individual Safety Leadership Assessment**

In working with hundreds of companies over the years, DEKRA has found that organizations successful at achieving—and sustaining—outstanding safety performance share certain leadership and management practices.

Executive Leading With Safety measures each executive's leadership of safety, using DEKRA's Safety Leadership Diagnostic Instrument. This instrument assesses how leaders' transformational leadership style is perceived, as well as their use of the seven safety leadership best practices. Leaders are provided with a report that benchmarks their scores against the scores of other executives across all industries.

### **Transformational Leadership Style**

Transformational leadership has been shown to be the most effective leadership style across the world in private industry and government and institutional settings. Transformational leaders are those most often rated as their direct reports' best boss.

Their teams often surpass their goals. Transformational leaders create loyal followers and create more leaders within an organization. Finally, transformational leaders naturally tend to create a culture in which safety of self and safety of others thrives. The four assessed elements of transformational leadership are:

**Inspiring.** Measures the extent to which the leader paints an optimistic picture of organizational direction and helps employees buy into it and gain confidence about their roles.

**Influencing.** Measures the extent to which the leader develops admiration and builds respect and trust.

**Challenging.** Measures the extent to which the leader thinks creatively and helps employees re-examine critical work-safety assumptions.

**Engaging.** Measures the extent to which the leader knows and understands employees as individuals and leverages coaching, feedback, and coaching to help them succeed. Our studies have shown that leaders who score high on transformational leadership tend to score high on the safety leadership best practices as well.

### **Safety Leadership Best Practices**

In addition, the following seven best practices will be addressed:

**Vision.** Measures the leader's ability to describe a compelling picture of the desired future of safety and their ability to challenge and inspire employees with the safety vision.

**Credibility.** Measures perceptions of honesty and reliability and whether actions are consistent with words.

**Action Orientation.** Measures the extent to which the leader is performance-oriented, has a personal sense of urgency, and focuses on the most important priorities.

**Communication.** Measures whether the leader is seen as an active listener and whether the leader keeps employees informed on the longer-term strategic issues, as well as needed tactical information and details.

**Collaboration.** Measures the extent to which the leader promotes cooperation and collaboration and encourages input.

**Feedback and Recognition.** Measures the extent to which the leader uses the power of positive feedback and recognition to improve performance and publicly recognizes the contributions of others.

**Accountability.** Measures the extent to which the leader sets clear expectations and holds employees accountable for meeting their commitments.

A transformational leadership style and engaging in the seven safety leadership best practices have been shown to predict the health of an organization's culture. We know from our work that they also have a direct impact on organizational functioning and safety outcomes.

## **B. Team Working Sessions**

The second phase of Executive Leading With Safety engages leadership teams in targeted working sessions that challenge individual and group theories and beliefs about injury causation and culture and what it takes to achieve safety excellence. These working sessions are designed to build alignment within the team and to help teams set clear direction on expectations and the culture they want to create.

Executive Leading with Safety Approach has numerous working sessions. Depending on the team's objectives and/or responsibilities, the team will work through some or all of the modules.

Each module is about two hours long and involves knowledge-building and high levels of leadership discussion about the implications of the concept to the leader and organization. The focus areas of each working session are as follows:

**Transforming Your Culture Through Safety.** One challenge for many leaders is understanding how to transform their culture. This workshop helps them develop an understanding of the culture continuum, where the client's culture currently resides, and which actions lead to a values-based culture. This workshop clarifies the cultural attributes that every person must consistently demonstrate. Leaders create their own personal safety vision in support of the organization's desired culture.

**Moving From Injury Prevention to Exposure Control.** Understanding the concept of exposure is crucial for executives. Safety does not truly improve unless exposure is identified and controlled or reduced. This workshop focuses on clarifying the difference between hazards, exposures, and risk. It also introduces the concepts of outcome randomness and system factors that cause exposure to thrive or go uncontrolled, the hierarchy of control, and leadership responsibilities for controlling exposure.

**Creating an Engaged Workforce.** Most organizations that are serious about safety seek to engage their employees. Engaged employees are more likely to follow the rules, go above and beyond job expectations, achieve better results and be good ambassadors for the company. Typically, employee engagement in safety takes different forms, depending on where the organization is in its safety maturity. In low-functioning organizations, employee engagement tends to be focused on safety of self. In high-functioning organizations, employee engagement is focused on safety of others. In this working session, we will review the various styles of safety engagement and discuss the science behind what occurs in organizations with world-class employee engagement.

**Moments of Safety Transformation (MOST).** There is a considerable difference between moments of compliance and moments of transformation. A moment of

compliance is a leadership interaction during which an expectation about adherence to rules and processes is communicated. This type of interaction does little to move the culture forward. MOST provides opportunities for leaders to move beyond a compliance mindset to an interaction detailing cultural expectations—to strike a blow for safety, often in a courageous and highly visible way. This workshop exposes leaders to the elements of a MOST interaction. Through scenario-based learning, leaders consider how they respond to a situation and how they might adjust that response to make it more transformational while affirming their strong commitment to safety. Finally, leaders will learn how to identify opportunities for applying MOST.

**Personal Safety Ethic.** The core of a leader is their personal safety ethic. The strength of this ethic has a direct impact on their effectiveness, not only in safety but across all performance areas. A safety ethic has four major components: empathy, connection, responsibility, and self-awareness.

Organizations serious about safety improvement understand that strengthening a leader's safety ethic increases their transformational leadership capabilities. In this session, we will discuss the four components of the personal safety ethic, the big five personality traits, and what can be done to strengthen one's safety ethic.

**Preventing Serious Injury and Fatalities (SIFs).** While all injuries are important, leaders are most concerned about incidents resulting in life-altering injuries or fatalities. The exposures and precursors that contribute to SIF incidents are different from those that contribute to non-SIF or low-potential incidents. This workshop provides clarity on the organization's SIF exposures, how these exposures are controlled, and what executives need to do to ensure that SIF- prevention systems are sustainable and robust.

**Brain-Centered Hazards™ and Reliability.** Understanding why an employee made a decision that resulted in an injury is an issue that confounds many leaders. This workshop introduces the concept of human performance reliability and provides insight into the factors that drive decision-making at the worker level. Part of this workshop is devoted to explaining how the brain functions and how it affects decision-making. In addition, this workshop helps leaders understand their role in improving human performance.

**Actions That Matter.** In high-functioning organizations, senior leaders don't quantify the time spent in safety; instead, they incorporate safety into everything they do. This is how they demonstrate safety as a core value. They allocate time to personally engage in such safety activities as attending governance meetings, speaking at significant safety recognition events, and attending meetings to discuss situations with the potential for serious injury or fatality. This workshop helps them understand the need for incorporating specific strategic, tactical, and symbolic actions into their overall safety approach. In this session, we will also discuss the need for leaders to spend time on safety, especially if the organization is at the avoidance level and seeks to move up to the compliance level. To make this shift, there needs to be a significant increase in time spent on safety at all leadership levels. There will be a mix of both management and leadership activities. Moving from the compliance level to the values level will, likely, require a similar increase in time and a shift from tactics to strategic leadership.

**Influencing Behavior.** We often hear, "Why did the employee do that? They knew better, we trained them, but they still did not follow the SOP." This workshop is designed to help senior leaders understand the context in which employees take action and provides them with valuable insights, so they can modify the context by altering the antecedents and consequences in order to create a new action.

**Sustainability Through Coaching.** Receiving feedback from a coach is invaluable. Every leader benefits from effective feedback, which helps them grow into successful safety leaders. This workshop is designed to help leaders improve their coaching skills by utilizing a rescue/responsibility model approach. The critical element of coaching is the leader's ability to recognize strengths and opportunities in others and then build on those using an impactful coaching methodology.

**Preventing Soft Tissue Injuries.** Soft tissue injuries represent a major contributor to an organization's injury profile. It is important for a leader to understand accident causation factors that lead to soft tissue injuries. Until causation is fully understood, leaders will struggle to take effective actions. This workshop focuses on the concept of load versus capacity and the actions leaders can take to positively impact both. This workshop also focuses on leadership's role in ensuring both systems and culture support their objectives.

**Leading Virtually.** In today's world, face-to-face meetings are often replaced by virtual meetings and discussions. Leaders who want to influence change must understand the impact of their voice when they talk, especially when the audience cannot see nonverbal behaviors. Understanding the impact of tone and inflection is critical to creating an environment in which communication is clear, targeted, and effective in driving change. This workshop also focuses on effective listening in a virtual environment and helps leaders understand which skills they must apply in our new virtual world.

### C. Individual Coaching

A crucial third element of Executive Leading With Safety Approach is the pairing of leaders with an adviser who has extensive expertise in changing organizational culture, in exposure causation and prevention, human performance reliability, and safety. The adviser will work with the leader to:

1. Understand the results of the safety leadership assessment.
2. Clarify what the leader would like to accomplish.
3. Develop a plan to help leaders more effectively demonstrate their commitment to safety.

The coaching relationship is highly variable and dependent upon the leader's role, desire, and needs. For most leaders, the most effective coaching involves:

- Detailed conversations about what was presented in the working sessions and its implications for the leader.
- Observing leaders in action, which could include listening to routine calls, attending meetings, or accompanying leaders to operating locations to observe their interactions.

- Conversations about what was observed and the effectiveness of those interactions to move culture and safety forward.

The frequency of contact can vary. However, it normally takes an engagement of at least once a month for at least a year to create the desired impact.

### D. Effective Safety Governance

Structuring proper governance and accountability when it comes to executing the safety strategy is another element of world-class safety. Even though it may be well defined, failure to understand the magnitude of change involved in strategy implementation can leave the organization vulnerable to poor execution. Investing in strong governance that drives the change process is the best insurance to ensure that the safety strategy becomes firmly established throughout the organization, both today and into the future.

### Executive Leading With Safety Approach

- Challenges executives to think differently and act in ways that effectively reduce exposure.
- Moves the organization from a focus on preventing injuries to a focus on understanding and reducing exposure.
- Provides individual development at a depth and pace set by the executive.
- Drives executive team alignment.

## Conclusion

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Avenues for injury are varied and complex, and ever present. Recognizing and controlling these exposures are important first steps in reducing the vulnerability of your workers to injury. But like any other critical business system, exposure management requires careful attention, disciplined application, and a measure of both short- and long-term commitment.

Properly structured governance systems provide the framework for an organization to recognize and control exposures. When safety governance functions at a higher level, it leads to safety excellence.

The common thread of organizations that successfully and consistently deliver safety excellence, is the relentless focus by leadership and workers, at all levels, to recognize and control exposure. This ethos evolves from embracing mature, high-functioning governance systems.

**Contact us to learn how we can help your organization build safety leadership expertise that will deliver safer outcomes and fewer injuries.**



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