



HEALTHIER WORKPLACES | A HEALTHIER WORLD



## Show #10 Transcript

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On this episode of Healthier Workplaces, the Importance of Influencing. This person is doing exactly what everyone else is doing, they just happen to, in words, get caught with their hand in the cookie jar. So if this person is doing simply what everyone else is doing in an organization, irrespective of whether it's right or wrong, how can we hold this person up as the single failure? How can we hold this person up as a bad example in the workplace? That ain't fair.

>> As you refer to it as the whack-a-mole approach, yeah, it doesn't solve the long-term systemic problem that's happening there. All you're doing is waiting for the next individual to follow the same bad path.

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Welcome to the Healthier Workplaces Show. I'm Bob Krell, founder and publisher of Healthy Indoors Magazine and your host for this show from AIHA. In 2008, three people were injured in an industrial accident at Sandia National Laboratories. This incident galvanized Sandia to re-evaluate its approach to investigating and preventing accidents. On this episode, we are joined by Brian Thomson and CJ Backlund, the individuals at Sandia that are heading up this influencer training initiative. Stay with us.

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>> The importance of industrial hygienists and OEHS professionals has never been better recognized. Safety science experts keeping workers and communities safe. A mixture of science and application. AIHA is the association that represents these professionals and what they do. Teamwork, thinking outside the box, and solving unique challenges, a winning combination for healthier workplaces and a healthier world.

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>> Welcome, CJ and Brian, thanks so very much for joining us this week on the Healthier Workplaces Show. Very interested in the topics that we're going to be speaking about. The topic of the day is the Importance of Influencing and how that can actually positively affect environmental health and safety at an organization. So let's talk a little bit about I guess the importance of influencing. Your blog that was on the AIHA site, in the synergist site, spoke about how you both came together to create a class, and this was in the aftermath of an incident at your facility? Is that really what drove it?

>> So it was an accident, a serious industrial accident, here at Sandia, and it happened in 2008. And a few years later, we came across this book. So we didn't create this course. The course that we teach is based upon this book, Influencer. And what it is, it's a group of social scientists, PhD social scientists,

have done just a ton of research into why people do what they do. And so they created this book to help you understand why people do what they do and how you can drive long-term behavioral change. And so we were really tantalized by the concept of that thinking because it really got under the belly as far as why people do what they do. We were looking at human fallibility, human error, why did people not follow the procedures, or why did they do this instead of that. And so oftentimes, you know, we just had our biases as far as why we think people do certain things in certain ways. This book just kind of opened our eyes to, oh my gosh, there's just a ton of other things that we need to consider. So it helps us look broader and deeper into the myriad of influences that are in play behind when people do what they do. So that's what really got us excited, and started teaching this class as a result of that. The excitement as it were, been doing it for 12 years now.

>> So CJ, again, how did the two of you end up together, you know, putting this class together at Sandia?

>> Do you want me to take that one?

>> That's still a Brian one.

>> This is fine. You know, Brian was saying that he's been teaching this class for 12 years. So he really set the, you know, stage for bringing this to Sandia. And I became a certified trainer for the course around four or five years ago, and started teaching. We co-teach it now. And prior to that – I don't know, Brian, if he was teaching it alone, or maybe he had somebody else that was teaching it. But it's interesting that we're both ES&H folks and we found it to be very important from – I'm sorry, I got something screwed up here. You're going to have to tone that one out, sorry.

>> That's okay, we got that.

>> Yeah. And I think the co-teaching, you know, I have the industrial hygiene background, and Brian has the health physics background. And so what's really valuable about that I think, to bring it to the industrial hygiene community, is the class content comes from a vendor called Crucial Learning. And there are, you know, companies all over the world actually that teach this content. But what's valuable about Brian and I teaching it, having coming from one of the national laboratories, and with our environmental health and safety background, is that we put kind of that tone into the class. We have the experience. We use examples that have to do with health and safety, that I think the industrial hygienists can relate to.

>> I guess one of the things that I took away from the article from the blog that you both authored was that, you know, often, when a bad situation happens, the higher-ups tend to want to point fingers and blame the individuals involved close to the incident, as opposed to, you know, looking at it in more of like I guess a holistic view. Am I correct with that?

>> Yeah. The pendulum has swung to both extremes over the years. It used to

be that you blamed the individual and you don't look any further. And then no, no, no, you blamed the system, the individual is blameless. And then it's kind of gone back and forth. I think the swings have lessened and the magnitude. And truly, this course and this model that is proposed by the book lets you look at things holistically, look at all things included. So we look at the individual, the person closest to the pointy end of the stick, the person who's been implicated in this event that had a bad outcome. We also have to take a look at the social influence. So the peer pressure. Understanding full well that peer pressure did not go away when we graduate from high school. Peer pressure is alive and well in our different workplace settings. And so sometimes people just kind of lose their way. Well, if they're by themselves, they might do XYZ. But dang, if I'm with somebody else, this other group, I don't want to look bad, I don't want to look foolish, I want to maybe be a poser so I can fit in, not get voted off the island. So I'm going to do XYZ instead of ABC. And so we have to look at those social forces, whether it's peers or maybe direct reports, as well as from above. And so we look at it from all different angles, then we start looking at the non-human influences, you know, look at carrots and sticks. We look at performance reviews. We look at bonuses, things like that, or getting called to the red carpet and be given your pink slip, whatever. So, you screwed up way too many times, go away. So look at the carrot sticks, and that might be some sort of an incentive or disincentive, like I'm just afraid of getting smacked in the rear end by the switch again. Also, I'm trying to grab that brass ring, I'm almost done, I'm almost there, just one more breath. And so we have to look at those things as well as the things within the environment – procedures, policies, tools, workplace. Do they make sense? Do they actually help get us the endpoint, the desired endpoint? Or do they get in the way? Are they out of date? Are they wrought with mistakes? And so we have to look at all those types of things that feed into why people do what they do. So that's where this really comes in handy, because it helps us look broader. So it's not just the one individual or the other pendulum swing over here. It's a system that color combo platter across the board. Hope that helps.

>> This approach that you're both proposing, is this approach something that's becoming commonplace in the workplace, or is this still like a concept that maybe a lot of employers haven't embraced as of yet? I'll pitch it out to either of you.

>> I'll try to take that one.

>> And I'll chime in afterwards.

>> Okay. And I guess what I would say is that, I like to look at this as when health and safety professionals show up, even if they're not in a management situation, but they're showing up as leaders – because we are – and you might be thinking about it along the lines of, are you a change agent? What are you trying to change? And if you want to be a change agent and move the needle towards, you know, a workplace where the probability of something occurring is lowered, you've got to get management to buy into it and in an efficient way.

And what I think is really great about a class like Influencing is that you get these tools. We talk about six sources of influence. And if you can use all six of them – and Brian was talking about them a little bit – your chances of getting traction are going to be better. And if you think about, in the industrial hygiene world, or anything safety for that matter, that you’re trying to control, and you look at the hierarchy of controls, with say elimination being at the top, but you’re moving down into engineering controls and trying to steer your customer – I’m going to call it a customer – away from the kind of knee-jerk – we’re going to use PPE (personal protective equipment), then it helps you to make that case when you bring these six sources of influence. And we give the students an opportunity to really diagnose. Maybe it’s a really deep-seated issue. Like Brian was talking about, maybe it came out of an event and you’re trying to get some corrective actions in place. If you diagnose it and look for certain vital behaviors that are going to, you know, move the needle – I used that term before – and use those six sources of influence, the probability of you getting the result that you want just shoots up. I think it’s more than linear.

>> And the follow-up to that, so, you know, having this ability to influence and being a good influencer is just something that some people just have an innate ability to do that. Or is it really more of a developed skill?

>> Do you mind if I take that one too, Brian?

>> Go for it.

>> You know, I think that people think it’s an innate ability. From teaching this class for the number of years that I have, I believe that it’s not. And that’s what we make the point of in the class, is that this is learned. And what you’ll do in the class is go through something that we call deliberate practice. And so that you can build some muscle memory around influencing and getting some successes in influencing. In fact, we encourage students, if this feels new to them, hey, maybe try some smaller goals that you want to reach, that are a little bit more achievable, and use these sources of influence and see if you can get the result, and then build on that. But they do have an opportunity to do what we call deliberate practice, build the muscle memory. And I firmly believe that it is not innate, that you can learn it. I want to say one other thing, can I, about that? And it’s the reason why I wanted to bring Influencer to the Industrial Hygiene Conference as a PDC. I have been on the board of several local sections. And a few years ago, I think it was in 2018, pre-pandemic, went to the leadership conference with AIHA. We did the strengths finder. That’s what the conference was about. And what it identified was, when we looked at it, looked at the data as a large group of like 250 industrial hygienists, what we found out and really caught my attention is that we were low on influencing as a strength. And knowing that we were teaching this class and that it truly is not an innate ability, I thought it would be great to bring it to AIHA conference as a PDC.

>> I mean, that’s super interesting. Brian, you know, you had mentioned in the article that a lot of times environmental health and safety professionals are

viewed as the safety cop, right? And that's been my experience too in my career, too. It's like, oh you know, Madame X or Mr. X is here, we've all got to start doing things right. Like how do you combat that or, you know, counteract that type of feeling, you know, maybe the workforce has when they see the EHS people there?

>> Yeah. CJ, you want to weigh in on that? I just have a few things that'll connect the dots on a few things after we discuss this issue.

>> Oh sure on the safety cop. I probably find myself in that role a little bit more than Brian, as a ES&H coordinator. And, you know, I think it's just really, really important that you become this trusted agent for management. And that doesn't come overnight, it takes some real work to do that. And so something I want to say about it is that we do teach the Influencer class here, but it's an overlay to a number of classes that we teach. We also, Brian and I teach a class that is called the Speed of Trust Class. It's how to build trust within your team. And we also teach a Crucial Conversations class. So these kind of all tie in together. And, you know, we try to make that point that, no, you don't want to be the safety cop, you want to be in partnership with your customer, with management.

>> We'll be back after this.

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>> Meet Alice Hamilton. She was an early pioneer in what we know today as industrial hygiene. Her work had a profound impact on AIHA's earliest members. AIHA's Hamilton Club recognizes organizations that continue her work. These corporate partners use innovation and expertise to shape the future of worker health and safety. Partners receive tiered benefits of access, recognition, contribution, and brand exposure. The Hamilton Club is the center of support and investment between club partners, AIHA, and its members. This is where the future of the profession shines the brightest. For more information, visit [aiha.info/hamiltonclub](http://aiha.info/hamiltonclub).

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>> What do you think, Brian?

>> It's all about relationships. So let me go back to something that might sound and look like we're coming at this and we have two different things, you know. There a bifurcation, but what I presented earlier as far as the person closest to the pointy end of the stick. And what CJ was presenting – and let me try to tie those together. When you have a bad outcome, bad event, you know, we typically try to find out what happened. And so this helped us to diagnose the conspiracy of causes or complex web of causes and it kind of drove through this outcome here, specifically looking at behaviors related to the person's conduct when the bad thing happened. And then what it allows us to do is to identify with much more surgical precision what we need to change, what we need to modify, what needs to be added or whatever the case may

be, whether it's related to motivation or knowledge, skills, and abilities, or something that's a social issue, or revising procedures or policies. So it allows us to be much more precise in our corrective actions. And then this follows on, so then how do I roll these out? How do I make it more readily adopted, accepted, received by the people I'm working with? So we have to influence their receptivity to the stuff to see that there's going to be a positive impact for them. Typically what I've experienced in my 40 years doing RAD protection is that beyond just playing whack-a-mole with a person that is closest to the pointy end of the stick, oftentimes what happens is that the manager doesn't want to hold that one person responsible because it's kind of awkward. You get that interpersonal awkwardness. And so instead of just holding a person and trying to address their behavioral choices, this applies the corrective action across the board. So one person sneezes, and everyone gets a chemo. Or one person makes a mistake, and everybody goes through retraining. And so there's this massive – just it kills the effectiveness of those corrective actions, just breeds more and more cynicism and skepticism, and then just demolish its trust that the rest of workforce has towards their management. So it helps us identify what needs to be done specifically for this individual, maybe look at the bigger picture, what else can be done so that's not a recurring issue. And also, this model also helps us if we're going to work on a new program or we're going to launch a new initiative or we have this new – if we're going to roll out, and how do we get people on board with us from the get-go? And this model helps us to kind of foresee what might be some of the barriers that might prevent quick adoption, what might make it more difficult for people, might make it feel kind of creepy for them. And helps you identify those things up front and then work on some proven strategies to make it more readily adopted and accepted by everybody. Because you're focusing on what it's in it for them, you know, with them approach. You're making sure that they have the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities to do those certain things, to behave in those certain ways at certain times. You've addressed the societal issues that might come into play that might, you know, run counter to what we want people to do, as well as to look at those non-human type stuff. So it's that kind of an effort that makes us useful for rolling out a brand new program. And then to connect finally with CJ, we apply both those aspects, whether it's fixing a problem, addressing an issue that had went wrong, or rolling out something new, bringing this other aspect when we as ES&H professionals, as safety professionals, we're trying to understand why people aren't wearing the required PPE, why do they keep on taking the respirator off, you know, find out they got a wad of chew in their mouth, after you pull off a full face respirator and they spit on the floor then slap it back on. You know, these unhealthful behaviors and choices, it helps us understand why they're doing that and helps us drive what can we do to make this much more common so I don't have to be the safety cop. People know what to do. They're seeing why it adds value. It's the established cultural norm. And it's fast, simple, and easy. It's convenient. And so all these different things roll together to make it much more readily and easily adopted and for long-term behavioral change.

>> Yeah, I mean, as you were mentioning earlier, you know, that tendency for a knee-jerk reaction, you know, for management to, you know, to like just come in and swoop in really heavy and hard and make everybody get retrained rather than single out maybe if there's an individual or a few individuals that really are the cause of it. But how is it difficult to get management to buy into this more nuanced approach?

>> Go ahead, CJ, you go first, then I'll weigh in.

>> Well, I guess what I was going to say is that, you know, this is a journey, isn't it? And as I was saying, this is kind of an overlay to other things that we're doing here at Sandia Laboratories revolving around management learning how to have those kinds of conversations with the workers and just creating what we call psychological safety. And so we're really trying to get buy-in from our management team, the non-ES&H managers, those that are performing the work, and really trying to make the case for this. And what I am finding over – you know, Brian talked about being in the business for decades, I have too. Is that I'm finding much more receptive management teams. I think they realize that they get a good return on their investment, because we can do things more efficiently. This is a way to do things more efficiently.

>> I mean, it's got to be challenging a little bit because, you know, as an EH&S professional, you know, at an entity, you've got the upper management you've got to deal with. You're also dealing with the workforce. You're kind of in the middle, right? So it's got to be a little bit of a dance almost, right, to be able to balance that so that you're able to reach out to both, right?

>> Yeah. I think early on, we had more resistance than there is now. Because typically, you know, you talk about the knee-jerk reaction to those oh snap moments, and it's faster and simpler just to whack the mole and kick them out the road, and kick them out the door. It takes a lot more time and effort to look broader and deeper for those nuance type of things and look for this, you know, as I said earlier, this complex web of causes that are driving the behaviors that gave you the outcome that you got. And so it takes time to do that. And that time takes money. And it might implicate the manager. It might implicate other things from the organization that the manager now has to fix. It's a whole lot easier just to whack the person and send them packing. But they're starting to roll around and realize, you know, yeah, this is a better way. I had a number of managers say, you know, this takes too long. And my response is, well, you know, if you got in trouble, wouldn't you want your boss and your HR department to take their time to understand you and why what you did made sense to you at that moment and that point in time what you saw based on what you experienced? Wouldn't you want them to kind of take it all into consideration if your job's on the line? Or would you rather them be really quick and send you packing out the door right away? Yeah, you're right, I'd want them to take their time and think about that. So it's that kind of change of thinking; that, yeah, you're right, I would want them to really understand me. So one of the key things that we share with managers is that this influencer

model helps us understand the full context of the situation. Context doesn't necessarily justify someone's behavior, but it helps you understand how they got there, how it somehow made sense to them. Helps you understand how they viewed the world at that time. It helps you understand what they saw, what they recognized, what they believed, versus what they didn't see, what they didn't recognize, what they didn't believe was actually possible. Helps you kind of walk in their shoes a while to understand, oh, so that's why. Because your biggest challenge would be if they don't take the time to understand how it made sense to this person when they did the thing to the thing and this bad outcome happened, all they do is send them packing and bring someone else new in, it's like the same situations and circumstances that kind of aligned for the first person will rear their head again. Boom, second person, you've got to go, you've got to go, see you later. And so this really helps to get to the heart of what's driving these behaviors and these outcomes.

>> Well, I mean, as you referred to it as the whack-a-mole approach, yeah, it doesn't solve the long-term systemic problem that's happening there. All you're doing is waiting for the next individual to follow the same bad path.

>> And what if you're going to find some person that you decide that they're guilty. You know, they didn't care enough, they didn't try hard enough. If they would've just cared more, things like this wouldn't have happened. But then what this also caused us to do is to look at the cultural norms, look at the normative behaviors in his or her operating group. It's possible that this person is doing exactly what everyone else is doing, they just happen to get, in words, their hand in the cookie jar. And so if this person is doing simply what everyone else is doing in the organization, irrespective whether it's right or wrong, how can you hold this person up as the single failure? How can you hold this person up as a bad example to learn from? That ain't fair. You've got to master your normative thing. You've got to look at these cultural norms. And so that now becomes more of an implication of the manager. How did they allow these abhorrent behaviors or whatever to become normative in their whole group? So we pulled that string too, right. So you say, well, why didn't the manager hold them responsible? Then we have to find out, well, why did it make sense for the manager to do what they do, or why did it make sense for the manager to not do what they didn't do? And so we apply the same model to the manager and everyone else that is involved. It's fascinating, absolutely fascinating.

>> Well, I mean, this ends up being a paradigm shift, doesn't it though, for many organizations? Because, you know, you described it as the whack-a-mole approach. I think maybe is the case in quite a few companies around the world.

>> Yeah.

>> One of the things that Brian and I do is, when we're teaching the class, we usually make a point to say to any of the students – and sometimes they're managers, sometimes their other ES&H professionals. They're coming to us



from all over the laboratory. They're research scientists. And we say, if you've got a – we usually have them bring a case study to the class so they can work through it. And that's what we'll do with the PDC. But we say, if you've got something that you want to just run past Brian or I, just to have a second opinion before you move forward, please do. And I will tell you, I've gotten a few phone calls from managers that, you know, kind of were like, they were in like shocked mode with what was happening to them. And just even having a chance to sort of sort that out and not bring that to the other person. One of our directors called it, act as second day mat instead of how you're first reacting to the person. So I have found that to be valuable. They can just call us. It doesn't happen all that often, but they do.

>> That's a great point. Yeah, we tell managers, especially new managers, now is the time to practice and perfect your "I'm not shocked face."

>> Right.

>> Because if they blow gas, you know, eyes bulging out, you know, on fire when someone brings bad news to them, that person will never tell them anything.

>> Right.

>> And these stories that'll be told throughout the whole department about that manager acting poorly will kill reporting. And so as a manager, they'll be flying blind because they won't have a clue as far as what's going on.

>> Yeah, certainly you don't motivate somebody to bring it forward, you know, if your reaction is like totally over the top.

>> Yeah.

>> Yeah.

>> It's interesting.

>> One thing that I'd like to weigh in is that this is all empirically based. It's not like someone woke up at Holiday Inn Express and decided to write a book one day on influence. You know, I had a number of these authors, different people that looked at it. So Dr. Mimi Silbert, she's fighting recidivism in the prison system there in California. Crazy successful looking at Delancey Street, which does like a 94% success rate at getting these people to turn their lives around. These are people with multiple felonies on their resume. They turn their lives around for good. Or Dr. Donald Hopkins, you know, he helped to drive out to annihilate the guinea worm disease that just bothered the people in West Asia and the sub-Saharan Africa for thousands of years. Or doctor [inaudible] used this same model for combating the spread of AIDS in Thailand. And so this was all empirically based, and that's why it works. Because, you know, the authors of the Influencer book and the course, they did some massive global benchmarking research project to find out, gee whiz, what's the secret of the success of these hugely successful influencers, and just packed it in this book and in this course.

>> Okay, a good example of influence. I'm also a causal analyst here. And we had an event at a remote location. It was a wind turbine location. And it was an electrical shock. And fortunately, the person was fine. But it gave us the opportunity to figure out what was breaking down, you know, what led to that. It wasn't just his fault. And so I used the influencer model to realize that we just were not providing this remote site with ES&H expertise so that they would know how to handle all the systems that they had on that wind turbine from a safety standpoint. And so it was very successful. And I know that that operation is still in that mode, where they're much better than they were several years ago. And I think the wrong way of handling it – and I can think about early in my career as an industrial hygienist, going into management and just, you know, like almost bowling them over with the industrial hygiene report and the data and all of that, and here's what you have to do. And their eyes are just glazing over. Oh, I have to invest, I don't know, \$100,000 into a new ventilation system. There's a different way to sell that. And that's what this Influencer course can help with.

>> Yeah, they'll call a bad reaction, they'll call a bad reaction by a manager. Like, what are you doing? Why'd you do this? Or like your mom would do with the hands on hips, what were you thinking, right? You know, like we all knew the – yeah, it's a matter of just ridiculing them or chastising them on the spot. Bring out their blame thrower and just crush their spirit, crush their soul. I can't believe you made me look bad. Or, now look what you've done. You've made a whole department look bad. What were you thinking? Oh my god, what have you done; what have you done? And it's just a guilt trip, this massive guilt trip, that just again demotivates anybody to bring them any news whatsoever. So it shuts down communication. It shuts down that psychological safety in that work group. And the work group then suffers, because, boy, that's the way it is. Okay, I guess just keep my head down, you know, my shoulder to the grindstone, mind my own business, call it a day.

>> CJ, Brian, thanks so very much for joining us today. I want to again do a shout out to your upcoming PDC, your professional development course, at the AIHCE Expo 2023 in Phoenix, Arizona. That event runs from May 22 to May 24 this year. And hopefully we'll see everyone there at this presentation. I'm looking forward to it.

>> Thank you.

>> Great, thanks.

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