Selling Industrial Hygiene/Occupational Health to Business Executives

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Business executives need to clearly understand the value industrial hygiene/occupational health (IH/OH) brings to their business. In other words, they need to be sold on the value of IH/OH. The IH/OH profession has not done a good job in this area. Following are examples of ways that IH/OH can be “sold” to executives:

- Changing the name of the profession
- Using the People, Public Trust, and Profit Value model
- Expressing IH/OH outputs in business terms, including converting IH/OH costs into Sales Equivalent Dollars (SE$)
- Emphasizing the role IH/OH plays in enabling technology

The Name: Not only is the term “industrial hygiene” a misnomer in terms of our customer base, it neither grabs executives’ attention nor encourages them to have further dialogue with us. Although a name change is unlikely, the term “occupational health and occupational health professional” is more representative.

The People, Public Trust, and Profit Value Model: This is a simple yet powerful model comprising of three elements that have clear value to any good enterprise. It is of paramount importance because IH/OH professionals play a significant stewardship role in protecting and enhancing all three of these values.

The value that could use the most promotion is “public trust,” which includes building up the reputation of the enterprise and its brands in the community, country, and world. IH/OH professionals play a role responsive to public trust.

Expressing IH/OH Outputs in Business Terms: If you want to attract the attention of the C-suite, you must speak using their terminology. One example is “Sales Equivalent Dollars” (SE$) and competitive advantage.

In my position as global director of health and safety at Proctor and Gamble, I occasionally had to address senior company leadership. Once, I chose to talk about competitive advantage and the cost of average performance. Neither of those sound like IH/OH topics, but I had to create a link between business practices and IH/OH that would resonate with business executives.

At the time of my presentation, P&G was about a $35 billion company, while workers’ compensation costs for that year were $11 million, and the profit margin was 5.6 percent. Meanwhile, based on hard data, P&G was between 4 and 8 times better than its competition. These executives would not be content with hypotheticals. Every number had to be verifiable.

I asked my audience to assume that P&G was 6 times better than its competition. $11 million multiplied by 6 is $66 million, the amount of workers’ compensation that the average company would have to pay. Then I converted the $66 million workers’ compensation costs—an IH/OH metric—to Sales Equivalent Dollars—a business metric—using the equation below:

$$SE$ = \frac{\text{ saved or lost due to injury or illness} \times 100\%}{\text{Profit margin as a percent}}$$

Therefore, SE$ = $1,178,571,400, rounded up to $1.18 billion. If P&G were average, they would have to sell an additional $1.18 billion to make up for the $66 million costs.

The executives of a $35 billion business did not really get excited about $11 million, but they were more interested in the fact that their health and safety program controlled workers’ compensation costs at $11 million, instead of the average of $66 million their competitors would pay. They got even more interested when they learned they would have had to sell an additional $1.18 billion to make up for the cost of being average. Speaking these executives’ language led them to understand the benefits of a good health and safety program.

The Role of IH/OH in Enabling Technology: In this case, “technology” does not refer to computer and web-related technology, but to chemicals and industrial processes. When I tell IHs that they are “technology enablers,” I often receive frightened looks: I am not sure that it has been
Within a year, P&G had the number-one selling brand. This business output was clearly driven by IH/OH, and I made sure that our UK executives understood that.

This was especially apparent in England, where at the time P&G owned the second-best selling brand and a competitor occupied the bestseller spot. All the manufacturing unions in England banned together and refused to handle enzymes until controls were in place. A team from P&G made a quick trip to England to lead the installation of the enzyme hygiene capability system, within the interim installation of a strict PPE regimen. With this system in place, the unions agreed to continue to handle enzymes. Meanwhile, our major competitor had to take enzymes out of their product.

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Most industries have hazardous chemical technologies or processes that could not be handled safely without IH/OH. Still, IHs' critical contribution is poorly understood and therefore undervalued by business executives. Our job is to change that.

References
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