



Principle to Practice

DAVID LYNN, CSP >> SIGNATURE SERVICES VICE PRESIDENT

I love football season. Stadium lights and fresh cut grass in the fall make me think about football. Growing up, my friends and I participated in organized leagues and we played in the backyard. The venue did not matter. Our competitive nature was evident in both settings. However, there were differences between a backyard game and a Friday night high school game. They required different levels of dedication and commitment.

When we played a “friendly” game of football in the backyard, we maintained the core philosophy of the game but our adherence to the rules was more liberal. The games were unregulated and it was the survival of the fittest. They lacked the structure and discipline that organized football requires.

Structure and discipline in organized sports taught me the finer points of the game. Coaches molded my personality. Rules taught me to appreciate fair competition. Dedication to practice enabled my success and teamwork to be molded into my character. All of these elements helped me learn to value the game and experience the rewards of my hard work. In essence, the structure of organized football created an environment with character, commitment and dedication...or a culture with clear expectations for the team.

Many companies approach safety like a backyard game where they make up the rules as they go. They have a competitive spirit but there is no discipline to the program that drives success. They lack teamwork, direction and boundaries for their program. The “backyard” safety culture does not experience the value of true dedication and hard work. However, companies can improve their own safety cultures if they recognize the difference and transition their organization to a structured team with focus and direction.

Companies with structure and discipline in their safety culture have the ability to teach employees the finer points of safety, just like organized sports. The structure molds the culture; mentors teach the value of safety and the rules help you to appreciate safety success. Commitment enables achievement and it relies on teamwork. In essence, a structured and disciplined safety program creates an evolving tradition – or a culture with clear expectations for managers and employees.

What does a structured and disciplined program look like? Successful safety cultures find a way to put fundamental safety principles into practice. They believe management commitment is important and employee involvement is essential. Professionals recognize how important it is to analyze work, put controls in place and train their employees. But, the principles are half the story. Leaders have to know how they will tactically put these principles into practice.

PUTTING SAFETY PRINCIPLES TO PRACTICE REPRESENTS THE STRUCTURE AND DISCIPLINE REQUIRED TO SUCCEED. THIS IS HOW AN ORGANIZATION ESTABLISHES A POSITIVE CULTURE WITH SHARED ATTITUDES, VALUES, GOALS AND PRACTICES THAT CHARACTERIZES A COMPANY’S REPUTATION. THE APPLIED PRINCIPLES ARE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A BACKYARD BALLGAME AND AN ORGANIZED TEAM.

Just like organized sports, you have to have a game plan and strategy that puts principle to practice. The plan should include a minimum of the following three components.

Safety Communication

Connect with employees. Market and sell your commitment to safety because commitment does not exist without consistent, visible support. Safety communications help elevate the visibility of a company’s commitment and they reinforce a positive safety image.

Training & Development

Employees do what they know how to do. Training and development should cultivate a culture that equips employees with the knowledge, commitment and desire to achieve safety excellence. Operate with proactive principles that support training and invest resources in individuals to enhance their skills and achieve superiority in performance.

Audits and Assessments

Scrutinize your processes. Safety audits and assessments are the primary tools

that measure performance. With the combination of systems, compliance and performance audits, measure the implementation and effectiveness of your systems. Gauge how well you practice the principles you believe. The data will give you trends that you can improve.

Putting safety principles to practice represents the structure and discipline required to succeed. This is how an organization establishes a positive culture with shared attitudes, values, goals and practices that characterizes a company’s reputation. The applied principles are the difference between a backyard ballgame and an organized team. Every employee has the obligation to understand these principles and make them highly visible throughout the organization. Cultures rely on the collective influence of every individual to support the team.

I challenge you to champion the cause in your work environment. Your commitment to your culture today influences tomorrow’s results! ★

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David G. Lynn, CSP, is a vice president of Signature Services, a division of Life & Safety Consultants. He is also a professional speaker, published author and improvement strategist with 20 years of experience. Lynn has authored books such as *Principle to Practice* and *Strategic Safety Plan*. Both books help readers develop execution plans that put principle to practice. To learn more, you can go to www.lifeandsafety.com or www.david-lynn.com.

