



Announcer:

It's time for the *IHSA Safety Podcast*.

Ken Rayner:

Welcome to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*. I'm your host, Ken Rayner. On today's episode, we're once again joined by IHSA's Maren Gamble, to discuss the impact of senior management on the performance of an occupational health and safety management system. Welcome back to the podcast, Maren.

Maren Gamble:

Thanks, Ken. I'm excited to be back.

Ken Rayner:

Okay, Maren. When you suggested this topic, who was the intended audience that you had in mind?

Maren Gamble:

For this one, I think I just want to let everyone know that I'm speaking right to the people leaders of our industries out there. The managers, the forepersons, the superintendents, and the senior management, the owners, the CEOs, and the presidents.

Ken Rayner:

Okay, everybody who is in one of those positions had better listen up to what Maren's providing here from a guidance perspective, because Maren's one of our experts when it comes to occupational health and safety management systems at IHSA. So she's a great person to provide guidance on this particular topic. So let's start off with this one, Maren. What's the impact of senior management on the performance of a company's occupational health and safety management system?

Maren Gamble:

Big question, Ken. Big question.

Ken Rayner:

Big, big question.

Maren Gamble:

First, I think I'll highlight a key difference between this topic that we're addressing today and some of the others that you and I have specifically recorded this year. We've done many episodes where I've walked through how using specific definitions and understanding concepts from a systematic view and formal ways can really make managing your occupational health and safety management system easier. We looked at the well-defined "Plan, Do, Check, Act" cycle, the definitions of hazards and risks, things like that. Today, we're actually going to step away from the definitions, systems, and the really well-defined concrete pieces, to something that is far less easy to define, but in my experience, even more impactful on the success of the company's occupational health and safety management system, regardless of the organization's size, maturity, and health and safety history. Today's podcast is actually coming from my own lived experiences, observations, and opinions that I have to date.

So to let those listening in on what some of that is, I wanted to let people know that I have spent a good number of years as a health and safety manager, working through developing a COR[®]-certified occupational health and safety management system for a general contractor more than 10 years ago, achieving COR[®] a number of times in that role. I also have a number of years of experience with IHSA as a COR[®] auditor, where I was working with hundreds of firms to provide feedback on their systems. And finally, I've had the privilege to manage the Health and Safety Excellence department at IHSA to get insight into more of the challenges faced by businesses of all sizes and maturity levels as they try to implement their systems. Why am I saying that? There's one thing that I've seen through all of that as I've gone through all these different positions, looking at different systems. Senior management, people leaders, but in particular, your most senior management makes the difference.

It's not about how much money they spend; it's about how much personal buy-in they demonstrate for the occupational health and safety management system. Time after time, I've seen examples of this myself. So for example, as a COR[®] auditor, one of the first steps that I would take if I was doing the full on-site external audit was to do a document review, read the manual, actually read it top to bottom, and do interviews with the top management. Before even stepping out on a site, this would give me incredible insight into what level of buy-in I was likely to find throughout the organization. If the senior manager was attending the opening meetings, was actually interested in what's going on, having knowledge of the system, and knowing what went on during the internal audit, that spoke volumes ahead of time. If I interviewed them and they knew their own documents very well, or even better, they could tell me stories about why they had to develop a document, and how it was developed, and even their own involvement in it. Those are key indicators that the implementation was likely pretty good because that senior manager had that buy-in and direct interest in the program. On the other hand, when it was completely handed off to a health and safety department, if an owner was unaware of what their program said or even argued against their own policy in some cases, that really did have a telling influence on what was going to be happening next. When it comes to being top managers and people leaders, they're always on stage. Ken, you yourself are a senior manager here at IHSA, and this is right to you as well because you're always on stage. Not just when you're hosting these fabulous podcasts, but anytime that you're present in the workplace or corresponding with staff and members, how you're corresponding and how you're presenting yourself is going to have an impact on communicating what your priorities are for our organization, as well as for the industry. No pressure.

Ken Rayner:

Let me give you an example that comes to mind immediately. And I'm going to give a compliment to our President and Chief Executive Officer, Enzo Garritano. So Maren, I don't know if you've ever followed up doing an inspection after Enzo's done it the month prior on one of our facilities, but he never skips a question or says, "I didn't have time to get this all done." His inspections are full, complete, they're thorough, and he sets the tone. So it's really challenging if I'm going to do an inspection after Enzo's done.

One of the things we have to do is read through the previous inspection to make sure that we're really clear as to what was found the time before and what we're looking for. And Enzo's are so thorough that it makes you also do it thoroughly, because he's the "top dog" at IHSA. So he didn't take the easy way out. He followed everything. He did everything as prescribed. What excuse do you have? Now, if he decided to go, "Ah, you know what? Checking up on these chemicals to see if we're in compliance with that...oh geez, you know what? It's a pain. I don't want to go looking around for these things." And then we would check our WHMIS [Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System] documentation and make sure that the safety data sheets were included. "Wow, that takes too much time. I'm going to skip over that one." He doesn't do that, so from a modeling perspective, what excuse could I have?

And it sets the tone. It really does set the tone. So to me, that's a really good example of how the person that's at the top of the chain when it comes to senior management at IHSA is demonstrating and role modeling the positives in terms of what needs to be done and in doing exactly what's prescribed.

Maren Gamble:

I think that's a great example. And it brings to mind a few other examples that are commonplace, at least in a construction environment. When the top managers are coming out to a site, semi-regularly, a lot of the time for site meetings, progress meetings. Maybe the owners and engineers are meeting at the same time...are they wearing all the mandatory PPE [personal protective equipment]? Do they have on proper work boots? Do they have their hardhat? If you require a vest, is that on? Are they meeting all the expectations of mandatory PPE for the site?

And then beyond that, are they insisting that those site rules apply to everyone? Say, representatives from the owner or engineering firms that are perhaps going to look at specific areas of the site, are we insisting that they have all the proper PPE? That they have the proper training to access certain areas if required? Asking all those questions and role modeling that to say that there's no exceptions to this. That the rules are in place not to check some box, but because they're actually vital to working on this job site and therefore there's no exceptions to that.

Ken Rayner:

Yeah, absolutely. So you have a construction project going on. The president of the company comes for a visit, and instead of being in proper work boots and proper PPE, they're in dress shoes. And because they're the president, they let that person come on site, and walk through the site, and take a look at what's going on, and then they leave. What message is that sending to everybody else? I guess PPE is optional. The signs that say mandatory PPE doesn't apply to everybody. The rules that we put in place aren't applicable to everyone here. So now we have different sets of rules for different circumstances. I think it becomes very, very confusing.

Maren Gamble:

That becomes confusing. That becomes problematic. That's a lot of additional questions that we don't want to have to answer, because there are no good answers for that. Another thing that I say is important for role modeling is, it's not just physically what you can see on you or even the training that you have. Because yes, if you're an owner, why not have your WHMIS training? Everyone else needed their WHMIS. Why not have your working at heights training if you're going to tour the sites? Making sure that you have similar training to the base training you would expect from your staff is also critical. But what do you do when a safety concern arises?

So if someone brings something up to you, do you dig in to find out what can be done? Or is one of the first things you say to defer it to someone else or say that it's going to be too expensive and having the conversation end at that? You can remember that your staff will actually likely be incredible innovators if you work with them and determine what the need actually is. Because sometimes they'll come to you with a solution that isn't a good fit from your perspective. But if you actually figure out what the actual need was, there's an alternate solution you can go to. And you'll find that your staff can be those incredible innovators and come up with new solutions to the problems that aren't going to be cost prohibitive. So do you dismiss or delegate immediately? Or do you dig in and really respond to health and safety concerns that are coming up? Senior managers need to lead by example because everything they do sends a message. And if you're deferring it to someone else, it says health and safety isn't worth your time.

Ken Rayner:

Yep, I love that. So I heard you talk about training. I heard you talk about management review. I heard you talk about employee engagement. So are there other elements, besides those, of an occupational health and safety management system or the audit that would emphasize the impact of senior management on the performance of a system?

Maren Gamble:

Sure, absolutely. When we look at an occupational health and safety management system audit, at the end of the day, if we look at legislation, senior management has the ultimate authority for the entire program and for the entire system that you might be implementing. That being said, the more that they can be directly involved with, the better. And yet for the most part, there's no way that person can be the one who's writing everything, reviewing every inspection record, and completely doing every effort toward health and safety. And they don't need to. That's not the implication that we're looking at here. There are certain elements that you'd see in an audit that are particularly key, and they're included in the audit because they establish the means for the senior manager to have a good overview of the system without seeing every single piece of paper.

So for example, your health and safety policy statement and your workplace violence and harassment statements. These are legal requirements to have in place by legislation, drafted for by your senior manager, and signed and dated on an annual basis. Okay, it's a legal requirement, but why? It's a legal requirement because it represents your senior management's commitment to these key areas of your business and to your key areas of health and safety for your staff. If you have a long-standing statement as a senior manager, particularly if it's existed since before you maybe even came into that role, I

actually recommend that you take a look at that statement and make sure that it does actually reflect the depth of your commitment to health and safety. That it captures the way you see the organization's current situation, as well as any initiatives that you're looking to take. A lot of the time the commitment stands. It doesn't have to be a regularly changing thing, but do make sure that that document isn't just signed without looking every year and truly represents the commitment of your senior manager.

Ken Rayner:

I've always thought of both the health and safety policy statement and the workplace violence and harassment to be a promise from the senior management from the executives and the board of directors, to the workers—to say, "This is our promise to keep you safe." And so if you're a new leader in an organization, and the health and safety policy statement doesn't resonate with you in that same way, and you can't get behind that promise for whatever reason, then make a new promise. Make a new promise in your words so that you can then get behind that. Because a promise is substantial. You promise something to somebody, there's an expectation you're going to fulfill it and you're going to live up to it because that's what a promise is.

Maren Gamble:

Well, that's exactly it. And Ken, you're making me think about IHSA's *Keep Your Promise* campaign that we've had going for a few years. We've got some awesome videos that have been coming out lately, and we tend to focus on that idea of "keep your promise to come home safely at the end of the day", and how impactful and meaningful that promise is. And I think in the context of this podcast, we're talking about a different layer of keeping your promise. Now we're talking about, what does a senior manager need to do to keep their promise to their staff to support them in making it home at the end of the day?

There are a lot of promises that are implicit in health and safety programs and in occupational health and safety management systems, and the other elements of the audit and your system are really there to support keeping that promise. So to look at other elements in the audit that go beyond the policy statement that really do support that senior management involvement, I have to talk about hazards, risk assessment, and controls, because that's the backbone of a system—identifying hazards, reporting hazards, identifying risks, and determining controls. A lot of the time there's a lot of input from your frontline staff and your health and safety teams, and perhaps your joint health and safety committee and your health and safety rep. Identifying those hazards and identifying the risks makes a ton of sense. They're doing the job. No one's going to know better than them what kind of hazards and risks come up. And they'll propose some amazing controls, in most cases.

But as a top manager, having a look at the proactive controls that they're developing, so often this is framed as a hazard risk registry or hazard list, the overall hazard list for the company, something like that. You can have a look at the proactive controls that are being suggested and promoted to put in place and ensure that, from your perspective, your experience, and your position as a top manager, you feel that that's the best you can do and that it's considering the hierarchy of controls. So do you actually see a way from your position of authority to actually eliminate the control that otherwise PPE might be being used for? My advice is to carefully review the controls and ensure you are comfortable with them. Make sure they allow you to meet that promise and commitment that you made, because you are ultimately responsible for health and safety under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.

After we talk about hazards, risks, and controls, and the importance of digging into the backbone of your system, recognize that there are also a couple of elements in the COR® audit that are designed to feed you information and an opportunity to take a look at your system. So again, you don't need to touch every piece of paper for perspective, but consider your stats, records, and trends that you're collecting from things. What information are you collecting from the work going on? Your manual, your program, your system will define lots of records that are being produced on the front line. What are you doing with those things? Collecting data from them and using that data to inform the changes that you're making not only validates the efforts being done by the front-line staff in generating those records, it also shows that you're listening. And again, it forms a part of the idea that as a manager, you are continuing to review the situation and considering the information that's being provided.

This funnels into the idea of management review, which includes stats, records, and trends, but it goes beyond that. A very fulsome management review is absolutely critical from an audit perspective, but also just to your system. It's a formal process where key pieces of your system are being presented to you for review. This is probably moderately in-depth compared to the rest of the year, and it is a detailed picture of what your company's health and safety system is doing and how it's functioning. This is your opportunity to ask questions, make comments, and talk to the staff about the things that you're seeing in a review. So really taking this as an opportunity to not just complete an audit element but to also engage with the process of review and the idea of continuous improvement.

Ken Rayner:

And I think you're talking a lot about inclusivity. And inclusivity is a choice. So management have the choice to involve their workers in the development of the system, in the continuous improvement of the system, in the modifications of the system, or they can choose not to. And I take it from what you just said, inclusivity is very important, in terms of making sure that senior management are listening to input from the workers, those that are using the system on a day-to-day basis, to ensure it's working for everybody.

Maren Gamble:

Absolutely. I mean, I think to myself, "If I had two systems, and in one of them I could see how my feedback was considered and in the other I can't, which one am I going to be more inclined to lend my support to? It's an easy parallel there that we can see.

Ken Rayner:

Okay. Maren, now that you brought up that interesting thought, if you were the president or owner of a company, knowing what you know about the value of senior management support to a system, what would your leadership look like?

Maren Gamble:

That's a complex question, Ken. I think a few things. It really is an abstract concept compared to some of the definitions and formal processes that I'm known to love. But I think it comes down to doing research into your own organization, recognizing that you are always "on stage," and trying to be a role model, and lead by example. When so much of business in the broader sense is about financial success,

timelines, and progress, it's easy for us to accidentally send out mixed messages about the priority we place on safety if we're not deliberate about making sure that we keep safety in the conversation.

So I'd start asking questions. When I say doing research it's, do we have documents that work? So, that monitoring effectiveness piece and making changes if not. So, are they user-friendly for the people who are doing the work? Is it all very formal and does it feel usable in the field? Or do we have documentation for the different rules that people are following? Do I follow all the rules? Do I talk about health and safety? Do I say no when an idea comes up? Or if it's something that I can't agree to do, do I say, "No, but why are you asking?" and try and figure out how we can address the concern another way? Do people actually talk to me about health and safety, ever? Do they approach me? Do I talk to people about health and safety? And when I do, is it in a collaborative way or do I find myself only talking to people to perhaps issue warnings or enforcement pieces? Is our system about learning and corrective improvement or about enforcement?

When I go to a site, is my first question always about percentage completion or delays, or is my first question sometimes about health and safety? Have I read our documents to know what's in them? And when I do have a conversation with someone, do I follow up on it, and do I communicate any actions that I've taken, so that people know that when they talk to me something is going to happen? Finally, I have to recognize that if I'm making changes, if I'm now suddenly the president or owner of a company and I'm changing things from how it used to be, it's going to take time. Things don't manifest throughout an organization overnight. So it's really a collection of your entire staff being chronically exposed to the behaviors that you would like them to emulate. It's about really continuing to reflect on how you're performing, to take feedback, and really try to make changes in yourself so that you can see those changes in the workplace.

Ken Rayner:

Maren, I would be happy to have any of my beloved family members work for you. You just sold me on it, okay. Maren as a president owner of an organization is going to establish such a culture that I feel very comfortable, irrespective of the hazards within the workplace, that she's going to create a very safe environment. And if I had a loved one working for you, I'd feel very confident.

Maren Gamble:

Thanks, Ken.

Ken Rayner:

Yeah, amazing. Now, we're talking a bit theoretically, and I know how much you love research and love applying it, so let's get into at least some of that so you can feel like we've covered it off.

Maren Gamble:

Good.

Ken Rayner:

Can't do a podcast with Maren without some research involved. There was a recent small business study that I know you were a part of that involved WSIB and the Institute for Work and Health, in Ontario. And it was, if I'm not mistaken, senior management support that was seen to be a factor in the outcome of the study, if I'm not mistaken. So what was the outcome, Maren?

Maren Gamble:

Yeah, I mean I think that was the moment that made me want to record this podcast with you now, Ken. It's something that I've seen in my years in this business, as I mentioned. It's something I've heard COR® auditors and Health and Safety Excellence program [HSEp] consultants talk about regularly. But recently, when the study identified it, it gave me that moment of thinking I should take action on this. It's something that I could maybe be doing more to communicate to people. So when the study was conducted, essentially the small business study was an opportunity for a number of small business firms to enroll in the Health and Safety Excellence program, which is run by the WSIB. And the Institute for Work and Health conducted a study that followed the businesses over a couple of years of participation in the program. They asked these firms a lot of questions about their experiences and attempted to identify things that were supportive factors for them being successful in the program and things that were challenges.

And one of the outcomes was that senior management support can form either a barrier or supportive factor, depending on how it's being experienced. So the idea of a manager who really puts safety first and is really skilled at that role modeling piece that we were talking about, then that's a supportive factor, in terms of making it easier for them to be successful in the Health and Safety Excellence program, which is about developing pieces of your occupational health and safety system. On the flip side, it was also one of the biggest challenges when they didn't feel that they were experiencing that kind of environment in the workplace. And so it was really a key takeaway there, in the sense that it has that impact. Not only are we talking about it anecdotally as consultants, but the firms we work with are expressing it as well.

Ken Rayner:

Excellent. So let me go back to Maren and as president again. So during your example, I thought I heard you touch on leveraging resource allocation, your influence and authority in the workplace, and how you would go about that, your policies, decision-making, your review and monitoring impacting the system. You covered a lot of that. As you were mentioning all those, Maren, I was thinking more along the lines of physical health and safety, but appreciating that there's more to that in the workplace. Certainly more now than there has ever been. Would the scope of what you would be seeking to impact as president be broader than physical health and safety? And if so, what else would it have included?

Maren Gamble:

Yeah, I mean the simple answer is yes. It goes well beyond that. And I think what's critical about this conversation about the impact of senior management on your occupational health and safety management system is that the senior manager is responsible for more than just your physical safety and more than just safety in general. And so we're talking about a skill that actually applies throughout the organization. If I step away from health and safety altogether for a moment and think about those

skills: role modeling and following the processes yourself and ensuring you're doing things in terms of efficiency, in terms of following up on progress and work pieces, in terms of providing the documentation you need to your finance department to allow them to process things—it does apply anywhere. But one piece we haven't touched on yet that I see as really critical that we haven't really touched on yet is the psychological health and safety aspect of the workplace.

So we've talked being able to self-reflect as a manager and taking a continual improvement mindset. I said what I would like to do as a president, and it sounded probably pretty great, but that's my perfect world. I don't think I would be perfect at that on day one and never stumble or deviate from that plan. Hopefully I'd be able to catch myself and make continual improvements and always stay toward that goal as we go. These are vital competencies for senior managers in general.

And interestingly enough, they appear as subtle themes throughout some of our programs around mental health. So there's a *Working Mind for the Trades* course for works and for managers, which we've recently started offering through IHSA. Those concepts do appear as subtle themes in there. And I also know that there's an eLearning program that we're working on right now that's going to come out pretty soon that focuses on supporting psychological health and safety as a manager in the workplace, specifically taking a detailed look at some of these skills and some of these competencies that we are talking about in terms of general health and safety today. So I would actually recommend anyone listening to keep an eye on some of those offerings on psychological health and safety in general, as opportunities to also work on some of these skill sets that have a wider application.

Ken Rayner:

Okay. So this was a very unique podcast for me, because I get to be the host of the podcast for each of them, but in this case I was also the audience to a great degree, because I'm also a senior management member at IHSA. So, I'm thinking about my modeling, about what I need to do to be able to adhere to everything you just mentioned in terms of what's going to have a positive impact on that occupational health and safety management system and our workplace in general. And how important it is not just from a theoretical standpoint but also from a research perspective. I mean, it's tangible. If you are somebody in authority, that has authority over workers in a workplace, appreciate that the role you play, the modeling you do, your behavior, how you adhere to things, what you're setting as an example, is paramount to the performance of your occupational health and safety management system. That's what I've heard from this podcast.

Maren Gamble:

I'm glad that's what you heard. That's exactly what I was hoping you would hear through this, Ken.

Ken Rayner:

Perfect. Well, I've got the message loud and clear, and I hope that has an impact on our membership as well, particularly those that have authority over workers in the workplace. Know that your actions matter. What you do matters. Your conduct and behavior matters. And so be mindful of it and set those positive examples so that your workers know that the rules don't only apply to them. They apply to everybody fairly.

Maren Gamble:

Ken, you just made me think as you were saying that: there's actually another area. And you know how I like to take it out of the industry every once in a while to give everybody some examples? Some of those influences that you just described are probably very parallel to another world that might appeal to some of our listeners in terms of the world of sport and playing team sports. And I feel like that might be something you have some thoughts in?

Ken Rayner:

Yeah, well, you know what? I think it has to do with team chemistry. I don't think it matters really what team sport we're talking about—team chemistry is absolutely a critical factor in the success of a team. And I think a big contribution to that chemistry is ensuring that everyone on that team, regardless if you're the star player or you're the last person that made the team, are treated essentially the same way. Now, I know, not everyone's necessarily getting paid the same. Not everyone's going to get the same amount of playing time. That's not what I'm talking about. But I'm ensuring that the rules apply to everybody, particularly some of the things that are hard and monotonous.

And when you don't cut anybody's slack, when you don't have two sets of rules, I think that brings teams together from a united perspective, and everybody feels like they are in it together. When there's different sets of rules for different people, all of a sudden it causes dissension. So I think, from my perspective at least, that's a great analogy and a comparison, between the workplace and team sports. You have to have everybody believing that they're in it together for the success of the team. Everyone's adhering to the same rules. Everyone's being subjected to the same hard work, and there's a reason for it because we're all doing it together.

Maren Gamble:

I love that. That actually made me think about when I had to fill out a survey for my son's baseball team. He's young and he's playing in a youth sport team. And they wanted us to provide feedback on the coaches. And they only asked a couple of questions. One of them is about skills development and that kind of thing, but one of them was about teaching fairness and integrity. And I think that's one of the distinctions here that we're making, too. It's one thing to show the mechanics of movement or teach the rules of a game. It's another thing altogether to teach the ideas of integrity and those conceptual things.

And I think for anyone who's been in and around team sport, whether it be at a youth level or a higher level, you can understand the importance in a team of the perspectives of the coach and what they choose to teach the natural leaders on the team, everybody on the team that people are looking to. To ask, how are they acting? And it can often create a whole vibe for the experience. So that's really what we're looking at when we talk about our workplaces. What's the safety integrity that's been established out there?

Ken Rayner:

Yep, great way to end the podcast, Maren. So that's a great example, and I think we've tied all that in very nicely. And you did a great job with really illustrating how important the senior management

impact is to the performance of a system and how it can positively impact that system. And you gave some great examples. Thank you so much for being with us, Maren.

Maren Gamble:

Thanks for having me, Ken.

Ken Rayner:

And thank you to the listeners for listening to the *IHSA Safety Podcast* and our episode on the impact of senior management on the performance of an occupational health and safety management system. Be sure to subscribe and like us on your podcast channel, and visit us at IHSA.ca for a wealth of health and safety resources and information.

Announcer:

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