



Maren Gamble:

COR® certification isn't just a checkbox. It helps companies cut injuries, lower costs, and build a culture of safety that lasts. Whether you're a COR®-certified company working towards it or just curious, today's conversation is one you won't want to miss. We're exploring the pilot of IHSA's Associate COR® Consulting Program and the people who know it best.

Announcer:

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

Maren Gamble:

The Associate COR® Consulting Program is being developed to support Ontario workplaces in achieving their COR® certification. In this episode, we sit down with representatives from the IHSA and some of the consultants who are helping to shape and deliver the pilot. Without further ado, let's talk to Chris McKean, the Vice President of Programs and Strategic Development at IHSA. His portfolio includes COR®. So Chris, what was the main driver behind developing the associate COR® consulting program?

Chris McKean:

Morning, Maren. Happy to be here. Thanks for having me on the podcast today. IHSA has core values, and it's essentially the foundation of how we work. These core values are collaboration and continuous improvement. So really for us, it's trying to work with as many like-minded organizations and people to get the good word out about health and safety. And we're always looking for ways to collaborate. We're always looking for ways to improve the services that we offer to our membership. We've got a membership of over 160,000 companies in construction, electrical, utilities, transportation, aggregates. So, for us it's how do you leverage relationships to try and get the word out to all these members, and we've been doing it for many, many years in various ways. My colleague, Michelle Roberts, she manages our Labour-Management Network as an example. That's a network of over a thousand volunteers around Ontario—more than 55 trades and sector specific and regional committees that volunteer to help get the health and safety word out to our membership.

That's one example. Our training partners, we have probably close to 100 trainers that are contract trainers on behalf of IHSA. So there's partnerships with training to make sure that we're training more and more people across Ontario. Last year we approached almost 100,000 participants in our training courses as a result of these partnerships. Specifically with COR®, about 10 years ago, and again looking at collaborating and continuously improving, we started an Associate Auditor program, basically getting into relationships with third-party companies and individuals who conduct external audits, external COR® audits. So that's the “check” part of the “plan, do, check, act”. For us, again, with regards to COR®, it's about continuous improvement and having that separate set of eyes, because IHSA, we're a certification body, and we're always trying to stay away from a conflict of interest.

As a certification body, we tend to... Within a health and safety association, we tend to want to consult, we tend to want to help, but we have to be very careful that we're not auditing our own work. So with time this development of our Associate Auditor work helps us get out of that conflict of interest. It helps us with continuous improvement of the program. We have over 20 associate auditors that do that on our behalf. So this is the next chapter of continuous improvement collaboration. We know COR[®] companies are 28 per cent safer than others that are not COR[®] certified. So for us, why not try to extend that impact into more of our membership?

Maren Gamble:

That's amazing. So if I were to summarize what I'm hearing there in terms of the gap or need that this program is built to address, we're really looking at expanding our partnerships and the number of collaborations that we offer to reach that large number of firms that you mentioned are out there in our membership.

Chris McKean:

Correct. All the while maintaining the integrity of the COR[®] program.

Maren Gamble:

It sounds simple to say we set up a partnership and we run with it, but I'm sure it's not quite as simple as that. So how did you go about designing the program? What kind of principles or models might've influenced it? How did you decide to set this up?

Chris McKean:

How did we decide... So there's a few things that are happening here, just leveraging the values that I was talking about and also talking about capacity. For us, it's about leveraging relationships to increase capacity. Definitely a gap there that we're always trying to fill. I think I alluded to that a bit already. Also, audit quality. The "check" part of the Plan, Do, Check, Act cycle is extremely important. If you're not doing it right, you can miss things in terms of the check or the audit, and if you're missing things, how do you know what gaps to fill? How do you know what people to train on updated policies if the check is not done appropriately? And we have a pretty prescriptive audit tool, it's over 150 questions. There's a reason for that. COR[®] is designed for smaller businesses and business owners who we know wear many hats, and when you have a prescriptive audit with specific questions, it just gives them that confidence to be able to do the audit appropriately.

And what we've seen over the years from a quality standpoint of the audits that come in, it's still a mixed bag. Some are done really well, because as they come in, we do review them for quality. Some are done really well, and the other end of the spectrum is some aren't done really well. And that's the mixed bag that we see. It's a real spectrum in terms of the audit quality. And of course that depends on the competency of the individuals that are actually conducting this check, the audit portion. The gap there is what if we could have more influence to improve the competencies at check? What if we could have more influence to improve the quality at check, at audit? So that's one of the gaps that we're trying to tighten up. And also member satisfaction. We want to make sure our membership, while they're getting safer, they're having a good experience because it makes them want to keep coming back. Can

we increase member satisfaction by making sure that they have guidance from competent individuals outside of IHSA that can help them make sure that that check or audit is done correctly?

Maren Gamble:

Thanks Chris, and I got to say-

Chris McKean:

Just some thoughts there.

Maren Gamble:

I got to say I love a plan, do, check, act reference. That is very much appreciated. If anyone listening to this wants to hear more about plan, do, check, act, we actually have a couple podcasts that specifically cover that topic, but it's also a fabulous segue because we have some other folks on this podcast this morning who could probably talk a lot about plan, do, check, act, if people were interested as well. For the next section, I'm going to go over to the consultants we have with us today. We've got three lovely folks on the line. We've got Mike Russo from Workbright, Abe Khalil from OHSPS, and Chris Ring from Maple Safety Consulting. Welcome, guys.

Chris Ring:

Thanks for having us.

Maren Gamble:

All right, so first question for you. What made you want to be part of the Associate COR® Consulting Program? I'll go to Mike Russo first.

Mike Russo:

Thanks, Maren. Yeah, it was a great opportunity to learn more about COR®. When the pilot program came out, I know there was a lot of discussion about what it was going to include and the purpose of it, but I've seen many companies struggle because they didn't have someone to help them along the way and guide them through the process of achieving COR®. And I thought this was a great opportunity to participate and to learn more about the program just so that companies who are pursuing COR® certification are likely more successful at achieving and becoming successful in it.

Maren Gamble:

Amazing. That sounds like an awesome reason to get into it. Let's go over to Abe, how about you?

Abe Khalil:

Yeah, absolutely. So I wanted to be part of the aprogram because I saw it as a way to better support firms that are working towards COR®. Now a lot of organizations want to do the right thing when it comes to health and safety, we know that. They want to build strong safety management systems that

are tailored to their operations. They want to keep their employees safe, they want to continuously improve. They don't just want to meet the minimum legislative requirement. But sometimes the process of even just getting started can feel overwhelming to many. So it doesn't have to be. So by joining this program, we can bring structure, we can bring clarity and the right tools to help them get started on their journey to achieve COR®.

Maren Gamble:

Amazing. And Chris Ring, how about you?

Chris Ring:

I think for me particularly, having brought my own employer from the previous COR® standard into COR® 2020 and just attending a lot of different industry meetings across the province, whether it be with the IHSA or the Ontario General Contractors Association (OGCA), I was just constantly hearing a lot of frustration coming from our industry peers that I seemed to recognize was largely just due to misinterpretation of the standard and confusion around certain aspects of the standard that we seemed to have a pretty good handle on. And consequently we partnered with AuditSoft and started the COR® Exchange, which was a free forum that contractors could come on and ask questions with, and between that COR® Exchange forum and just our own involvement in different meetings around the province, we found ourselves almost consulting anyway a lot of the time and trying to offer bits of advice here and there where we could. So when this pilot program came along, it seemed like a perfect opportunity to kind of formalize what we were trying to do in the first place and really expand that service to try and bring people into the standard with a better understanding of how they can get there.

Maren Gamble:

Amazing. I mean, listening to all three of those answers, it brings me back to a number of years ago when I was a health and safety manager for a general contractor myself, and I was looking to achieve COR®, and once we finally had that certificate and we were ready to hang it on the wall, some people asked me if you could do anything different, what would you do different about the process? And the first thing I said then was I would've asked more questions of the people who could answer those questions early.

And I hear an echo of that from all three of your answers in that desire to provide that clarity, to give those answers, to help build competencies. And that really resonates for me as someone who has gone through this process as well. I mean, that sounds great to me, guys. Moving on to another question for you. I'm wondering if you can comment on your experience in the program so far. Is there anything that has surprised you? Maybe talk a little bit about the training that you've received for this program. I'm going to go to Abe first this time.

Abe Khalil:

Yeah, absolutely. So going into the program, I expected to receive that technical training and the resources needed from IHSA on how we can better support organizations with COR®. But what really surprised me was the ongoing support from IHSA. The IHSA has a dedicated team that's always on it. They're responsive, they're supportive, they're committed to making sure that we have what we need in

order to help these organizations on their journey to COR®. And it also really reaffirmed for me that the process for achieving COR® isn't complicated as some organizations think it is. A lot of people like to think that it's a long, dreadful process when it really is not.

Many organizations feel or assume that they need to completely overhaul their safety management systems, but in reality, most of them are already doing the right things. It's just a matter of documenting it properly and making a few targeted adjustments. So we had received a very extensive training in person from the IHSA team, and we've really dug into the areas that really make the standard work in practice. So on top of all that, with all the ongoing support and guidance, I think this COR® Associate Consulting group can really support organizations on their journey.

Maren Gamble:

Awesome. I'll go over to Chris Ring next, if you want to let us know a bit about your experience in training so far in the program.

Chris Ring:

Yeah, absolutely. When we agreed to enter into this pilot program with the IHSA, the thing that was most important to us, the vision that we had at Maple Safety Consulting was that whatever training we would enter in with the IHSA, we would leave that training with a confidence to be able to say that coming to us for advice is no different than going to the IHSA directly or going to an Associate Auditor directly. I think we heard some frustration in the industry about some inconsistencies, depending on where individuals were going for to get their advice. So that was what was prioritized for us.

We wanted to ensure that coming out of this, there was a real sense that if you come to one of these consultants in the pilot program, you're going to get the very same information that you're going to get if you go direct to the IHSA directly. So that involved a lot of in-person training. It was very similar, as I understand, to what the Associate Auditors themselves get, which was intentionally targeted so that, again, everyone involved in this program is speaking at a level that is consistent with what the IHSA is expecting.

Maren Gamble:

Well, that's fabulous. Let's also hear from Mike Russo.

Mike Russo:

Yeah, for me, to be honest, I don't think there were any surprises. We had initial discussions about what the program entailed and the training was quite extensive, and I think it definitely helped me gain a better understanding about COR® and the standard and the process of certification. And just to add, working with a client right now through their COR® journey, I see the benefits of it because the transition, the transformation that I've seen with this one company has been quite tremendous, and I think it has a lot to do with the information that we gained from our training with IHSA, the vetting process. It's not only training. There are some competencies that are required, and I think I'm seeing the benefits of it now and so is this company that I'm working with.

Maren Gamble:

Amazing. So all three of those answers, to me, the big thing I'm hearing is that true dedication to the idea of partnership that Chris introduced in the beginning of this podcast. To say that the idea, the backbone idea of this is a partnership and a collaboration, and I think that spirit of engagement really comes through in the answers that you guys gave. Really appreciate you guys sharing those experiences so far. I'm going to pop over to Chris McKean here for a second and hear from his perspective. How did you approach supporting and training the consultants during this pilot?

Chris McKean:

Yeah, I think the gang alluded to it a little earlier, just with regards to existing resources. But we're fortunate that, because we live and breathe continuous improvement and collaboration, it's not our first crack at this kind of stuff. Whether it's been bringing training partners on board to deliver *Working at Heights* training or our associate auditors, the approach is always very similar. There's lots of oversight, there's lots of interaction, and we try to make any type of training or advice as inclusive as possible. These aren't one-way relationships where it's a push of information. There's a lot of intricate back-and-forth when it comes to working with new individuals on the COR® program.

A lot of history with COR® with us and around Canada. But I think the best part when you do collaborate with new people is new questions. So we've been doing it in Ontario at IHSA for 13 years now, but in the training—because I participated in some of this as well—that we worked on with Chris, Natasha, Mike, and Abe, you get new questions, because there's new people with new ideas. And that was the basis. So really getting an intimate knowledge of the ins and outs of the COR® standard, COR® 2020 standard is of utmost importance. But when you do work with new people and you get the new questions, it creates a lot better conversations. So that was the philosophy around the infrastructure of the program.

Maren Gamble:

So without actually saying it, Chris, you just referenced the Plan, Do, Check, Act cycle again, which is my favourite because what I'm hearing is you're essentially using the training and support interactions to check what you're communicating, and it's allowing you to even improve how we're onboarding these consultants, which, you know, just got to sneak that in there.

Chris McKean:

It's great.

Maren Gamble:

Now, I have mentioned a few times, and I think you may have as well, that this is a pilot program. We're using the pilot tag at this point. So a question that I want to ask you, Chris McKean, is what does success look like for you in this pilot phase?

Chris McKean:

IHSA loves a good pilot. We always have a lot of ideas floating around the organization in terms of how we collaborate better and how we can come up with continuous improvement projects, so we always

start with a pilot, and that is for learnings, trying to figure out how the infrastructure works, all the people that we have involved and that we want to move forward with, is that working? What's the feedback from the membership? So when you look at the outcomes of a pilot, I think if I can relate back to the gaps, the gaps around capacity, the gaps around audit quality, the gaps around member satisfaction. So these are the things that we're going to measure throughout the pilot. And it'll take a while. As everybody knows, COR® isn't something where you just hit the on switch and you get it next week. It takes time. So this pilot's going to take time.

So we need to see, for example, from a success standpoint, are we extending our reach through the Associate Consultants to parts of the membership that IHSA may not have reached in the past? Audit quality. I made reference to the mixed bag in terms of quality before. Is quality going up? Is quality becoming more consistent? Are we seeing audit scores becoming more consistent? We're fortunate to be working with AuditSoft in terms of our audit application, so potentially giving our Associate Consultants access to this platform, training on this platform, so that they can help the membership have a better experience using that system, generating more consistent check, more consistent audits. So also at the end of each course certification, we always survey our membership just to see what their member satisfaction is with us with the audit. And in the case of this pilot, we'll be surveying them on their experiences with the associate consultants. So there's a few indicators that we'll be measuring in terms of what success looks like. So is capacity getting better? Is audit quality and consistency getting better? Is member satisfaction going up?

Maren Gamble:

Beautiful. It sounds like a pretty robust set of performance metrics that you're tracking there, Chris. So that'll be interesting to keep an eye on, I think. Now I am going to give everyone a chance, or I'm going to ask everybody on the line here today to let us know how our listeners can find you. But before I do, I just wanted to give an opportunity for any final thoughts from any of you on the line, anything that you'd like to add to our conversation here today before we close out. And Chris Ring, I'm going to put you on the spot first.

Chris Ring:

Sure, no problem. To close out, I think what I would like to really push as an idea, as a notion out there to any potential listeners who are either struggling with COR® or COR® certified already or looking to get into COR®, is that our approach at Maple Safety Consulting really is to open the client's eyes to a lot of processes that they're already doing. That has kind of been our *modus operandi* from the start, is with a lot of the misinterpretation of what the standards are asking, people are under the impression that they have to reinvent the wheel, start from scratch, rewrite their processes, and rewrite their procedures.

And what we have found is largely, to echo what Abe had said earlier, that a lot of firms are already doing things. Perhaps they're doing them in different aspects of the company. It might be taking place in your estimating department, it might be taking place in your quality control department. There are certain things that a lot of companies are doing that just need a little health and safety breath breathed into them. I don't think COR® is as daunting as some people in the industry make it out to be. It is a lot more attainable than some of the reputation it receives.

Maren Gamble:

Awesome. Thanks, Chris. Mike Russo, anything on your mind?

Mike Russo:

Chris is bang-on. I think that's a very important point he made. I think, for me, what I would suggest, or one piece of advice that I'd leave listeners with is to really understand where you stand in your journey towards COR® certification. I think for many companies, they wait too late in the process to understand where they are, and that's not good because that's when you get caught off guard and a lot of surprises pop up. But doing that in advance really gives you a good understanding of where you stand, where there may be gaps in your current health and safety management system that might need to be closed. And like Chris said, I think there's a lot that companies may already be doing that meet the requirements of COR®. They just may not recognize it or don't understand the standard, perhaps, to make that connection. So I think just doing a gap assessment initially and seeing where you stand and what needs to be put in place is a very important step that, in my experience, many companies wait too late in the process to do.

Maren Gamble:

Amazing. I think for those who listen a lot to our podcast, you're probably recognizing how many of the keywords that I've talked about in some of the other podcasts are coming up here today, and it's exciting to hear. Yeah, exactly. Abe, any final thoughts?

Abe Khalil:

Yeah, just to build on what Chris and Mike said, COR® doesn't have to be complicated. Sometimes it's made out to be this daunting process. It's not. And I think with the right guidance and support, companies can build that strong safety management system that they're wanting to achieve that goes beyond compliance and to create a safe culture and workplace for their employees. So that's really what this associate consulting program is all about.

Maren Gamble:

Awesome. So last but not least, Chris McKean, I'm going to come over to you, but can you also let our listeners know if they want to find out more about the program in general from IHSA? How can they find out more?

Chris McKean:

Easiest place to go is our website ihsa.ca/cor. Click on the Getting Started button. You'll see a landing page in there on the COR® Associate Consultant Program that highlights all the consultants in the room that you are listening to today, including Natasha Braganza, their contact information, what the program's about. So highly encourage the membership to go there. And listening to what people have been saying around the room here in terms of final comments, it resonates with me, the don't wait. Be proactive, don't wait. Listening to Mike Russo talk about people waiting till the last minute, that's where things get challenging. The reason I'm saying that is we also do a lot of work with buyers of construction

services around Ontario, so right now with maybe around 25 buyers of construction in Ontario that we work with. And my colleague Ken Rayner has been working with them for about a decade now, and it's really been about trying to embed better health and safety practices into procurement processes.

So looking for health and safety certifications like COR® when you're bidding on work. And what we can tell you, as I alluded to the not waiting, is 2025 for buyers in a decade has been the busiest year in terms of buyers announcing health and safety certification requirements like COR® and contractual requirements. Just as an example, off the top of my head, this year, Halton Hills made some announcements of construction projects. The city of Oshawa did the same. The Region of Peel did the same. Those are new requirements they've announced this year. So there's three buyers of construction. City of Toronto was an early adopter of COR®. They actually made some updates, pretty significant updates this year. And then finally, Region of Halton. So that's five so far in the first nine months of the year, which it's a record year for buyers in terms of they're adjusting their requirements and implementing new requirements.

And for a whole host of reasons. Some will tell you, looking at the results that came out from *R. vs. Greater Sudbury* and others, just realizing it's time to make sure that companies that they're hiring are safer. So yeah, don't wait, because as more and more buyers of construction get on board, the requirements will start to change. They'll start at maybe 25 and 30 million for a year or two sometimes, and then moving down to as low as projects that are 500,000. So don't wait. Be proactive.

Maren Gamble:

Those were pretty awesome comments to go out on. I really do appreciate that. But I think there's one burning question left that the listeners may have, and I'm going to go around to each of the consultants to ask it, is how can they get ahold of you directly? Mike Russo?

Mike Russo:

Yeah. The best place to get ahold of me is to visit my website at www.workbright.ca, and there's contact information and you can learn more about COR® and how we help companies on the website.

Maren Gamble:

And Abe?

Abe Khalil:

Search us at ohsps.ca. They can also email me directly at abekhalil@ohsps.ca, or they can connect through LinkedIn. I'm happy to chat and answer any questions about COR® and workplace safety.

Maren Gamble:

Beautiful. And Chris Ring, I know there's actually three consultants at Maple Safety Consulting, so how do they get ahold of you or members of your team?

Chris Ring:

Yeah, I would say like all things a quick Google search is the quickest and fastest way to anything these days, so Maple Safety Consulting into the Google bar. We will be the very first option that pops up. Maple.ca/safetyconsulting is the website, but I think it's probably a more realistic to expect the listeners to just pop that into Google, Maple Safety Consulting, and all three of our contacts will pop up.

Chris McKean:

It worked. First thing that came up.

Chris Ring:

There you go.

Chris McKean:

Nice.

Maren Gamble:

I love it. We will also be providing the links that you just heard in the podcast description if our listeners want to look there. And with that, thank you for listening to our episode on the associate COR® consulting pilot. Be sure to subscribe and like us on your podcast channel and visit us at ihsa.ca for all your health and safety needs. Reach out to us at podcast@ihsa.ca to share your ideas for future podcasts.

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