



The INGAA Foundation, Inc.

# **Integrating Culture and Leadership: Making Safety Personal**

*Creating an organizational desire for an incident-free and  
High-performance culture*

Prepared by BST Solutions

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The INGAA Foundation, Inc.

20 F Street NW Suite 450

Washington, DC 20001

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## **INGAA Foundation Steering Committee**

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## Table of Contents

Foreword.....	4
1.0 Introduction.....	4
2.0 What Safety Means to Your Company’s Value System.....	5
2.1 Organizational Culture .....	5
3.0 Leadership Best Practices .....	6
4.0 Transformational Leadership.....	7
5.0 Making Safety Interventions Personal and Transformational .....	8
6.0 Personality and Its Impact on Safety Leadership Behavior .....	9
6.1. Emotional Resilience .....	9
6.2. Learning Orientation.....	9
6.3. Conscientiousness .....	10
6.4. Collegiality.....	10
6.5. Extroversion.....	10
7.0 Creating Demand for Change within Yourself .....	10
8.0 Conclusion .....	10

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Guides to Leadership.....	5
Figure 2: Safety Leadership Model.....	6
Figure 3: Transformational Leadership Style.....	7
Figure 4: Blueprint for Safety Transformation.....	8

## Foreword

The individual—whether a company leader, or an employee—plays a key role in fostering a culture of safety. In order to further support a safety culture among its members, the INGAA Foundation developed the following document to explore the concept of making safety personal for each individual. Fostering this ideal within each individual facilitates enriched safety cultures within a company and the industry as a whole.

### 1.0 Introduction

In making safety personal, there are a couple of issues to acknowledge and address:

1. Leaders must accept the fact that safety cannot be made personal to others until it is truly and deeply personal to that leader.
2. An individual worker's day-to-day conscious beliefs are shaped by their behaviors and the subsequent consequences that come from those behaviors. There are many other values that come into play when shaping core beliefs, such as honesty, integrity, respect and caring for other people.

A company's culture is often described as “the way we do things around here” or “the unwritten rules.” Culture arises from shared values and beliefs held within the organization, which lead to shared norms of behavior. These behavioral norms are reinforced over time as they lead to successful outcomes and positive consequences.

A common example relates to operating procedures. It is not uncommon to find that operating company supervisors deviate from the letter of the written procedure, finding ways to do the job more quickly and efficiently (at least in their perception). If they are praised, it reinforces the belief that efficiency and speed are valued. If they do not experience adverse consequences (e.g., injuries or chemical releases) from taking a “short cut,” it reinforces the belief that their practice is sound. In this situation, leaders would probably say that operating procedures are important and operational discipline is valued, but shortcuts become the norm.

The culture of an organization and the organization's leadership are inextricably linked. Leaders have the ability to create and drive change in a culture by what they do and what they do not do. For example, a leader who requests frequent updates on installation of new production equipment without ever asking about resolution of safety audit items helps create a culture that values production – even if safety shortcuts are taken to achieve it.

To advance beyond the level of safety achieved through process safety management systems alone, organizations should adopt a Comprehensive Process to improve their company's leadership capability and culture to achieve or ‘execute’ on process safety. This capability should integrate culture and leadership characteristics critical to incident prevention. This

approach includes four major components – Anticipation, Inquiry, Execution, and Resilience – aimed at building a strong safety culture that supports effective leadership and management safety systems.

## 2.0 What Safety Means to Your Company’s Value System

Let’s take a look at the notion of safety as a deeply held value. Everyone has a very personal stake in his or her own safety. Most people have a deeply held value for the safety of their own families and loved ones. Likewise, the vast majority of leaders want all employees safe from harm.

A leader can recover from a production setback, an economic downturn, a key employee leaving, even the loss of their job. Recovery from the loss of a human life is much more difficult to manage. Worker safety represents the importance that we place on human life.

Until a leader becomes truly connected to safety in his or her value system, it is impossible to assist others in making safety personal.

## 2.1 Organizational Culture

Culture matters. When strategy and culture collide, culture is usually victorious. If we are to achieve zero incidents, the necessary cultural change requires focused and relentless execution of very specific behaviors in coordination with employees. See Figure 1 for a guide to leadership, including the leader’s role in a respective companies’ organizational culture.

Figure 1—Guides to Leadership



### 3.0 Leadership Best Practices

The notion of engagement is critical. A leader must become aware of challenges that exist in achieving a safe working environment. Many times leaders are not truly aware of the difficulties that employees face in the field. The following methods are just a few examples of how leaders can engage in and truly understand the safety challenges of their employees:

- Take a job site tour with the workers in inclement weather, muddy conditions or during hectic phases of the job;
- Sit in on an accident investigation and ask the tough questions;
- Lead a safety meeting and engage workers in discussions;
- Visit with or call an injured employee to understand how they are doing and to assure them of your concern. (A personal visit optimizes the effectiveness of a leader's engagement).

Supervisory contact with workers involved in safety incidents personalizes the event for both the leader and the employee. The principle of contact allows the leader to become more aware and to develop an appropriate sense of empathy for what it takes for our people to deal with the challenges of truly working safely and the impact of our safety challenges and failures. See Figure 2 for a visual representation of the safety leadership model.

Figure 2—Safety Leadership Model



## 4.0 Transformational Leadership

Beliefs are shaped by behaviors and the subsequent consequences that follow. A leader should immerse and engage him or herself in the organization's safety processes to make safety more personal. The more the leader engages, the stronger his or her value for safety becomes. In addition to engaging, the leader needs to think about his or her obligation to the sanctity of the lives in the organization. For example, do you think of the families of your employees as having an equal level of desire to see their loved ones safe as you do your loved ones? Do you see yourself as having a responsibility to assure the safety of your employees in the same way you want someone looking out for your loved ones? Would you allow your child, spouse, mother or father, sister or brother work in the most hazardous part of your business and feel confident of their safety? Think hard about this and do an honest appraisal of your answers to these types of questions, as they are integral to making safety personal to you. See Figure 3 for a visual breakdown of Transformational Leadership Style.

Figure 3—Transformational Leadership Style



## 5.0 Making Safety Interventions Personal and Transformational

Self-awareness is another influencer on the ability to make safety personal. We often are not aware of the impact of the things that we say and do. It is not simply a matter of extolling the virtues of safety; a leader must take action on safety. Many leaders discuss the importance of safety, and then take actions that promote productivity or expediency over safety. Below is a list of actions that most industry leaders have taken that are inconsistent with making safety personal:

- Sharing a safety moment, but failing to make it personal or seeking to connect with workers.
- Sitting in safety meetings while looking at a cell phone or papers.
- Going up and down stairs hurriedly or not holding the handrails.
- Spending a minute to talk about safety at the beginning of a meeting and then spending an hour on operating issues and never mentioning safety again.
- Going to a site to review an issue, but failing to take the time to go into the field and talk to workers.

All of these examples show a leader that talks the talk but does not follow up with real concern or awareness of safety issues. Leaders must find ways to improve self-awareness. How a leader acts speaks volumes about what is personal to them. Leaders must become more aware of their own actions if they are to help themselves and others understand the personal nature of safety.

Personality often is a barrier to a leader understanding and executing on the above ideas, concepts and dimensions that drive beliefs and values. An individual's personality is cemented by the time he or she is an adult, and it is unchangeable by conventional means. Fortunately, most leaders have certain personality characteristics that can actually help that leader in the effort to exhibit behaviors that make safety more personal for them and the people that interact within the organizations they lead. See Figure 4 below for the blueprint for Safety Transformation.

Figure 4—Blueprint for Safety Transformation



## 6.0 Personality and Its Impact on Safety Leadership Behavior

Personality research took a large step forward a few years ago when a group of psychologists at a major university produced a study<sup>1</sup> that determined there were five personality characteristics – The “Big Five” – that affect a leader’s ability to behave in a way that influences the behavior of others and an organization in general. These characteristics are simple to understand and self-assess.

### 1. Emotional Resilience

Emotional Resilience is how a leader handles anger and fear. The leader who loses his or her focus and lashes out with anger when workers are not performing adequately loses the ability to transform and teach. Those who allow fear to make them shy away from speaking about issues lose the ability to encourage and influence. There is great variation in leaders on this dimension.

### 2. Learning Orientation

Learning Orientation is about a leader’s ability to be positive and open to ideas and creativity that people bring forward. This creates a positive or optimistic atmosphere in the organization and allows workers to change. Leaders who let cynicism in may create a pessimistic atmosphere in where it is hard to gain worker buy-in.

<sup>1</sup> Costa, Paul T., and Robert R. MacCrae. Revised NEO personality inventory (NEO PI-R) and NEO five-factor inventory (NEO FFI): Professional manual. Psychological Assessment Resources, 1992.

### **3. Conscientiousness**

Conscientiousness deals with a leader's ability to take what others say seriously and to have their own words taken seriously. It is about personal accountability of actions and values.

### **4. Collegiality**

Collegiality is how the leader interacts with people. How does the leader treat people? Does the leader respect workers? How does a leader behave when he or she has a disagreement or a conflict? Does the leader have consistent standards for all employees? Simply put, collegiality is how easy the leader is to be around.

### **5. Extroversion**

The more extroverted the leader is, the easier it is for them to spend face-to-face time with workers. This makes any kind of personalization much easier.

## **7.0 Creating Demand for Change within Yourself**

The bad news is that you cannot change your personality. The good news is that any leader with the desire can compensate for their personality or, in more direct terms, "change their behavior." Still, this is much easier said than done. The only motivator that is strong enough to sustain a behavior that is outside of an individual's personality profile is that individual's values. If a leader wants to personalize safety and he or she is an introvert, the leader must connect with their own value for safety. This is a very direct and conscious way which will allow them to overcome their introversion and spend more face time with people on safety issues.

## **8.0 Conclusion**

There is no magic bullet for personalizing safety. Those who have had the misfortune of living through fatal or devastating, life-altering injuries on their watch might have an advantage in this area. Those who have not had this experience can personalize this for themselves and others. As a leader, the keys to this are: **SELF-AWARENESS**, making personal **CONTACT** to better understand the **IMPACT** of your actions, and developing a stronger sense of **EMPATHY** for the challenges that people face in working safely. Leaders need to look inside themselves to have a sense of **RESPONSIBILITY** for those they lead. For a leader, realizing this is a difficult journey. It may require help from others to facilitate a personal transformation and resulting success. Being coached and receiving feedback is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength and self-confidence, as well as confidence in those around you.