

'Times are Changing – Are You'

Chris Jerman, CFIOSH, FIIRSM – Safety Manager,
John Lewis.

A warm welcome was extended to our speaker for today: Chris Jerman, who has been a safety professional for some 20+ years.

Good All Round Managers:

Chris outlined the John Lewis safety philosophy which is about employing the right people, who know what to do, at the right time, and know what is important at any one time. The emphasis is upon having really good managers who incorporate an understanding of health and safety into their everyday roles, rather than employing a number of dedicated health and safety managers. This approach may not work for all organisations.

A 'Common Sense Approach':

Chris has a refreshing approach to health and safety (a 'common sense' approach, in fact) and took us on a journey back to 1992 when the 'Six Pack', emanating from Europe, came into effect. At that time, Chris 'dared to be different' and began to challenge some of the thinking behind the Regulations.



He whimsically outlined the typical health and safety training course (see the slides on the website www.bhsea.org.uk/april2014slides.pdf) that probably everyone in the audience has attended at one time or another (maybe over and over again!) and the common objectives to all the courses (like covering the law way back to Roman times!). A member of the audience remarked, tongue-in-cheek, that Chris had missed one of the standard topics – the obligatory revisionary session which covers all the questions likely to come up in the exam!

Focus on What's Important:

Chris questioned why it had to be this way. His way is to address what is important to the business – like the goal of the safety management system - rather than cover topics for the sake of it. He also questioned the fact that we have been producing legislation for some forty plus years and still have not reached the end of it!



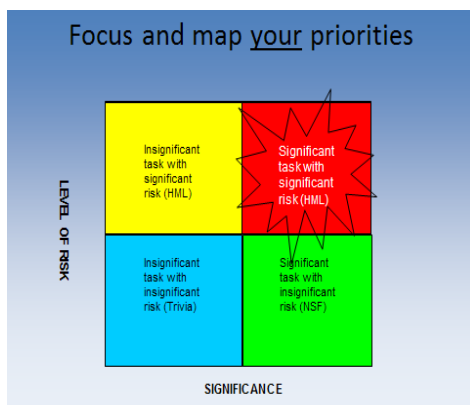
Have we somehow missed the goalposts and gone too far in the wrong direction?

Are we indeed like Chicken Licken – we think that the sky is falling in and the world is coming to an end just because an acorn has dropped on our head. Are we creating unnecessary legislation for every conceivable safety scenario? (Chris had recently come across a risk assessment for using the stairs!). Are we afraid of what would happen if we stopped producing this legislation? And is it all relevant – remember the requirement of the Factories Act 1961 to hot wash or white/colourwash the walls of a factory every 14 months?

What Does Safe Look Like?:

We should be asking ourselves questions like “How safe are we as a business?” The goal should be to “provide a place of employment that is safe enough to do in it what we do in it”. The key words are ‘Reasonably Practicable’. We need to understand what safe looks like. How will we know when we get there? What will we do when we get there? Or, are we just chasing continual improvement just for the sake of it?

Chris challenged the notion of whether managers need training only in health and safety, or whether they should be getting training in becoming better



managers? In Chris’s view, the basic tools of being a manager can sometimes be lacking. Managers need to be able to deal with distractions, new enforcement rules, new pieces of kit and to be able to think for themselves rather than have to be prompted.

What is important is to focus on the priorities - the Significant Task with the Significant Risk and Chris produced a diagram (above) to illustrate the variations of this with examples, such as the

Insignificant Task and the Significant Risk – the sort of task that you would contract-out to a specialist. For example, John Lewis has contracted-out its refrigeration processes, whilst retaining responsibility as the client. We should not be focusing on trivia. Neil Boon commented that unfortunately we sometimes do so because of the fear of litigation. Often people will produce risk assessments based on simple operations - like standing on a footstool to reach a shelf - rather than assessing a really dangerous practice. George Allcock commented that often people will not see that there is a significant risk associated with the insignificant task.

Thinking Differently:

Chris made the point that when you ask a manager whether ‘X’ is safe, it can be a difficult concept, *BUT* the concept is easier to grasp if you ask ‘what is *unsafe*?’ which is more tangible. The Regulations of 1992 brought in the requirement for Risk Assessment. A Risk Assessment done well is a very useful document that describes the activity and its potential to be unsafe. Ask yourself:

- “What could go wrong?”
- “How can we prevent it?”
- “What would we do if it did go wrong?”

But as a business we need more. Low risk does not mean no risk.

The Seven Steps to Risk Assessment:

- 1) Work out what you do as a business;
- 2) Express that as tasks and activities;
- 3) Prioritise the significant and shelve the trivial;
- 4) Risk assess and record significant findings;
- 5) Act as appropriate and proportionate;
- 6) Monitor and manage the residue
- 7) Stick to the plan.

George Allcock suggested that all employees should understand the subject of Risk Assessment and Chris added that having a rudimentary concept of risk assessment is useful in all areas of life. However, in the working context, it is important to understand the controls. At John Lewis, the emphasis is upon



addressing the **positive** and focusing on what managers should be doing, rather than what they shouldn't be doing. Chris firmly believes that we should be giving people the confidence to 'DO THE RIGHT THING'.

Evidence Driven Management:

Chris finished his session by making the case for an Evidence Driven Management approach rather than the traditional model, which did not include Risk Assessment. The raft of

legislation (the 'Six Pack') that came into force after 1992 brought risk assessment into the traditional model but not at the heart of it. In a risk centred/evidence driven management approach as illustrated here, risk assessment is firmly at the heart.

Tim thanked Chris for his excellent and possibly a little controversial presentation, and asked Members to show their appreciation in the usual way.