



# Safety Scene

## What to Look for in a Safety Leader

Learn about five personality characteristics that shape leadership performance.

by Molly E. Butz

**L**eadership is an important factor in all facets of a component manufacturing facility. From sales to production, leadership is often at the root of success. Unfortunately, effective safety leadership can be a difficult hurdle; no one wants to be the person constantly hounding the other employees to put on their safety glasses or be careful with the nail gun. However, understanding the personality characteristics that create effective safety leaders and finding ways to compensate for leadership shortcomings can dramatically shift your company's fundamental safety culture for the better.

Dwight Eisenhower once said, "Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it." Well put, Dwight. In fact, Eisenhower's formula makes a solid foundation for effective safety leadership. Think of it this way: if your employees choose to wear their safety glasses regularly because they understand the potential dangers a component manufacturing facility can present for their eyes, you've created a strong and healthy safety awareness culture that will develop and grow over time. This is in contrast to your employees choosing to wear their safety glasses simply because they're told they have to and don't want to face disciplinary action. Let's take a look at how to achieve the first scenario through safety leadership at all levels in your facility.

### Where It All Starts

To begin with, effective safety leadership comes from the top down. Yes, it is also true that a safe working environment is the result of an effort on everyone's part. But it's difficult to create and maintain a solid safety awareness culture if it's clear the uppermost echelons of management don't believe safety should be a priority. CEO/Owners can demonstrate their commitment to safety by taking an active part in company safety activities; investing time, effort and money in the company's safety program; and by personally abiding by all company safety and health policies. Let's say it together: "actions speak louder than words."

Beyond the CEO/Owner, effective safety leadership becomes the responsibility of the person appointed to manage safety in your facility. Their leadership skills can have a very direct effect on the success of your program. For a deeper understanding, it's important to consider that a leader's personality characteristics influence how they choose to lead. Following are five commonly accepted personality factors that indicate strong leadership qualities: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism (OCEAN). These "Big 5" often form the basis of employee personality tests. As we take a closer look at each of these factors, keep in mind that they are not positive or negative, but simply attributes that can affect the way an individual thinks, acts and reacts.

**Openness, or Openness to Experience**, is just as it sounds; people who score highly in this area tend to be more open to new ideas in addition to being more creative and, at times, unconventional in their approach. A safety leader with a good deal of Openness is likely to find interesting new ways to teach and promote safety concepts rather than showing the same video over and over again. For instance, the safety leaders at Schuck Component Systems, Inc. in Glendale, AZ implemented a

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### at a glance

- ❑ An effective leader empowers people to do things because they want to do it.
- ❑ It's difficult to maintain a solid safety awareness culture if management doesn't believe safety should be a priority.
- ❑ Most leaders exhibit five characteristics: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism.



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There was much to be discovered at Simpson Strong-Tie's BCMC booth this year with several new and expanded products for the Component Industry. Visitors to the booth saw first hand how these products offer new possibilities for building faster, safer or more cost effectively.

"The BCMC Show is a highlight for us every year," said Tawn Simons, National Manager for the Engineered Wood Industry at Simpson Strong-Tie. "It's the perfect opportunity to showcase our new products and applications for the coming year, giving attendees a sneak preview of what's ahead. In addition we also enjoy networking with our valued customers and industry leaders at the Show and this year was no different. Even with the slowed building economy, the quality of attendees made the Show a big success. We already look forward to next year's BCMC in Denver!"

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## Safety Scene

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successful "Safety Bingo" incentive program as an innovative way to reduce their injury rates, improve overall employee safety and health and lower their insurance costs. (See **Safety Scene** in the April 2007 issue of **SBC**.)

Controlling natural impulses falls into the **Conscientiousness** category. Being spontaneous can be fun, and occasionally a quick, impulsive reaction is necessary; however, from a safety perspective, good planning is needed to form a solid foundation for a positive safety awareness culture. A high degree of Conscientiousness is important in safety leadership to ensure efficient scheduling, planning and attention to detail. Consistent safety committee meetings and employee training sessions along with thorough, organized reports/records are just a handful of the items a Conscientious safety leader will provide.

A high score in **Extroversion** generally equates to high levels of energy and activity. An extroverted safety leader is commonly an enthusiastic, assertive person that makes frequent contact with others regarding pertinent issues. As a safety leader, feeling comfortable with one-on-one and group discussion provides an open line of communication between the leader and the employees.

**Agreeableness**, the fourth factor, defines how a person relates to the needs and feelings of those around him. The Agreeable safety leader is routinely optimistic and well-liked, which provides a stable platform for constructive, compassionate training. Understanding and taking into consideration the individual needs of the component manufacturing plant employees makes training more efficient and effective which

leads to a constructive safety awareness culture.

The fifth and final personality factor is **Neuroticism**. People that score high on Neuroticism are perceived as negative, easily threatened and overly emotional. Clearly, these are not often regarded as advantageous characteristics for forming a positive, resilient safety leader. It's also good, however, to realize that people who clock in at the other end of the Neuroticism scale tend to err on the side of being too relaxed and have the potential to overlook the importance of an issue, for instance a possible safety hazard.

## On the Lookout

Besides the CEO and Safety Coordinators, these five personality factors can help you identify other individuals within your company that may not be considered as leaders under everyday circumstances. For instance, looking for the employees that easily make friends or frequently suggest inventive ideas in meetings would be good candidates for smaller, bite-size leadership roles among their peers. Giving these folks a focused safety task like managing the Lockout/Tagout program or monitoring Personal Protective Equipment usage, is a simple way to "test" their safety leadership skills for a potential promotion in safety or another area of the company.

It's important to remember that leaders come in all shapes and sizes. Using OCEAN to spot the people who have the qualities you're looking for in a safety leader will help your safety awareness culture flourish. Safety first! **SBC**

*To pose a question for this column or to learn more about WTCA's Operation Safety Program, contact WTCA Staff at 608/274-4849, email [wtca@sbcindustry.com](mailto:wtca@sbcindustry.com), or view the Operation Safety demonstration online at [www.wtcalco.com](http://www.wtcalco.com).*

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