

# Introduction

Welcome to the Second Edition of *From Accidents to Zero: A Practical Guide to Improving Your Workplace Safety Culture*. As you'll come to find, this isn't really a regular sort of safety book. It's not a reference guide to legislation, or an overview of management systems. It doesn't explain the complex mechanical workings or the deep scientific evidence behind a particular model of safety behaviour. And it won't attempt to pioneer a new one either.

This book doesn't attempt to be comprehensive: it is not a prescription for performance improvement and it does not cover *every* aspect of safety or culture. In fact it strives to be opportunistic, focusing on ideas and methods that have a plausible scientific explanation for how they can *create safety* in the workplace.

Yes, the title infers a reduction in accident statistics, but that's one of the intended *outputs* from using this book – not the core focus. Following the ideas shared within these pages won't *guarantee* a reduction in workplace accidents – though many of the tools and concepts contained in the following pages *have* indeed had that effect in many organizations. But if we direct our efforts to *align safety* with the business agenda, *engaging those around us* to bring forward their *contributions* and *collaborate*, this will certainly *result* in us moving closer on our journey *From Accidents to Zero*.

The aim of this book is to attempt to deconstruct some of the mystery that surrounds – and arguably has become – ‘safety culture’. It seeks to strip back the academic theory and the grey clouds of complexity to provide a critical and concise narrative that offers food for a thoughtful mindset in the hope that one or two of these short chapters will encourage an alternate perspective, a rational review or even just a second thought.

This is not a safety course. I’m not expecting you to sit down and listen to what I have to say and nod your head sagely every few moments then go home. I don’t expect you to agree with everything in this book. In fact I positively *want* to make you feel skeptical, provoke your thought and stimulate discussion.

The traditional view is that culture change takes a very long time. I don’t subscribe to this theory. Culture change can take as long as we *want it to*. Though genuinely norm-based ‘that’s the way we do things around here’ change may certainly take years to fully *embed*, don’t be put off by that! We can drive meaningful, visible and value-adding changes as quickly as we want them to happen. And when we realize that culture changes *one person at a time*, we can understand that if we’re prepared to put in the effort we can make a real difference very quickly indeed.

Toolbox talks, employee surveys, suggestion schemes, safety campaigns, posters, stand-downs, procedures, policies, quizzes, checklists, audits and protective equipment inspections have all had their day. Sure there may still be a place for them in the workplace, but they won’t get you to where you want to go: *zero accidents*. Why not? Here’s the secret: because most of the people in your workplace are *not thinking about safety all day, every day*.

- They're thinking about doing their work;
- They're thinking about doing a great job;
- They're thinking about their family and friends;
- They're thinking about their lives.

Those traditional approaches may be all well and good, but they fall short on one point – they make an assumption that all workers *want to* learn. We make matters worse by then insisting that workers *have to* do safety, that it's a 'condition of employment'. It's The Rules. It's The Law.

'Have to' or 'want to' – which is more attractive to you? Right! So how do we *help* our colleagues to *want to* work safely? We need a different approach. And that's what you'll find in this book. Rather than pages of prescription you'll find discussions on behaviour, trust, mindfulness, values and leadership. We'll talk about ways to involve, engage and motivate workers, to encourage collaboration and build a shared understanding of what corporate culture really is, why it's so important when it comes to workplace safety and how we can harness its power to take us closer to our vision of a workplace that's *free from injury*.

## WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

You may be starting out as a safety professional, maybe you're a seasoned practitioner or perhaps you're someone with an interest in making things safer in the workplace.

You may have already made good progress with safety, reducing the number of injuries in your organization to an all-

time low. Or perhaps you find your Accident Frequency Rates on a performance plateau.

Whoever you may be and are, at whatever point in your journey to zero accidents you find yourself, I sincerely hope that this book has something just for *you*.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The first rule of how to use this book ... is that there are *no rules* on how to use this book.

It's designed in a way that you can read any of these short chapters, at any time, in any order you wish. As a suggestion to get you started, have a look at the *Contents* page and see which of the chapter headings spark some excitement or interest in your mind, and begin there.

Or you could just flick the book open at a random page and start from that point. If you prefer a more traditional method, start at the beginning, and just keep turning the pages until you get to the end. Whichever way you choose, all I ask is that you approach these chapters with an open mind and a readiness for thought. A smile on your face from time to time will also work wonders.

As you may have already guessed from the title of this book, there are 26 chapters, starting with A, and ending with Z. Each chapter is short: the point being to articulate the key issue quickly and get you thinking.

## WHAT'S NEW?

It seems so often the case that subsequent editions of books take on weight, some even doubling each time. In this case, the aim has been to keep things practical – as suggested by the subtitle – and allow the book to be used by anyone and everyone, to be shared, to be used in the workplace, to support action and inspire discussion. Accordingly, the fat has been trimmed back from some chapters, whilst others have been elaborated in response to feedback from readers. In this new edition you will find extended discussions about the power of behavioural observations, the concept of corporate mindfulness and an overview of the development of what we have come to know today as 'Behaviour-Based Safety'. There is also a new section exploring the challenge of building accountability for safety at work.

Following publication of the first edition, a number of discussion groups were held around the world using the roadmap provided in the centrefold of the book. Over 200 health and safety leaders of all levels explored the challenges to creating and sustaining an organizational culture that has safety at its heart. Accountability was a recurring theme in every one of these groups, so towards the end of this edition you'll be able to find the output from these discussions in the form of key themes for future consideration.

Like the inaugural edition of this book, each chapter concludes with a series of reflection points, questions and activities for you to consider – there's now over 100 of these for you to explore. These endnotes are designed to encourage you to think critically about your current approach to workplace safety, to challenge your own beliefs, to push the edges of the

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envelope a little. Feel free to jot down your thoughts in the white space around the questions, it's your book after all!

Please remember, this book isn't about *preventing accidents*; it's about *creating safety* in the workplace. You can make a difference, right here, right now, today. *Enjoy the journey!*

Andrew Sharman

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