

## Trends in Safety Leadership Coaching

By Doug Gray

What is safety leadership coaching? My definition: Safety leadership coaching is an emerging field of professional development for yourself and others.

*Reading tip:* Scan the words in **bold**. Then apply them to your world. Or contact me to discuss.

The phrase *emerging field* recognizes the fact that **the safety business is new**, since OSHA gained influence in 1970. Prior to that, workers were measured by hands, feet or hours of productivity. The early safety professionals were compliance-driven people tasked with issuing fines, citations, tickets and quotas. At some companies, a safety infraction report (SIR) mandate was required by 4:00 p.m. each day. If an employee received three SIRs, then it was time to find another job. Many safety employees were former police or military. The safety cop compliance requirements remain a powerful legacy today.

In the 1990s, the safety industry, like most industries, was affected by **global trends** including humanism and diversity. **Individual choice** was recognized more than ever. Leadership and organizational development programs emerged as professional schools of research. In the workforce, safety leaders supported individual choice, good judgment and reinforced desired behaviors. **Safety coaching** emerged as the dominant methodology to observe and recommend desired behaviors. The **CSP program** gained influence as a minimum expectation for hiring and program implementation. Safety leadership coaching emerged as a field of professional development.

The phrase *professional development for yourself* recognizes the fact that all change starts at an individual level. As a species, humans change in response to external influences that promote our survival. If we need to learn a new skill or relocate to the next job site, we do so. In the U.S., most

people now have an average of five careers. However, too many safety leaders only have one career. Many people resist change. Safety leaders can embrace coaching and training or they can ignore them. They can embrace career changes or they can ignore them. Too many safety leaders ignore career development opportunities.

**Safety leadership coaching encourages people to explore choices and develop their strengths.**

The phrase *professional development for others* reinforces the job description that safety leaders like you typically **observe and recommend desired behaviors**. You typically have broad access to all aspects of a job site or company. Consequently, you have vast potential impact on quality, operations, sales and business development. However, safety leaders do not embrace their potential influence. Too often they stick to their own business and keep their heads down. That limits one's influence as a leader. **Safety leadership coaching leverages your vast access and potential influence so that you can obtain desired results.**

There is an old story about a student who seeks a teacher. He travels to many lands and reads a lot, stares at a mirror and generates lists.

He is lonely. One day he realizes that he learns best when he is in relationship with others.

So it is with safety coaching. **Humans learn best when we are in relationship with others.**

Here are some simple coaching questions:

- 1) Who is the wisest leader you know?
- 2) How can you develop better relationships with others?
- 3) What are you afraid of in your career?
- 4) Who needs you to coach them?

