



National  
Transportation  
Safety Board

## Safety Culture: How leaders continue the journey

Robert Sumwalt

Presentation to Patriot Rail Senior Leadership Team



The NTSB is an independent federal agency, charged by Congress to investigate transportation accidents, determine probable cause, and issue safety recommendations to prevent future accidents.





## The Board



Mark Rosekind



Chris Hart



Debbie Hersman



Robert Sumwalt



Earl Weener





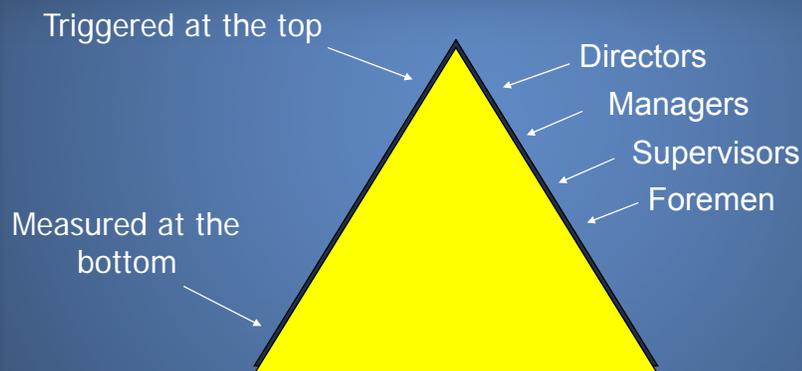
## Washington DC Subway (WMATA)



“Contributing to the accident -  
WMATA’s lack of a safety culture...”



## Safety Culture is:



Safety culture starts at the top of the organization and permeates the entire organization.

## Levels of Performance

- **World class**
  - » Top 3 - 5 percent of the industry
  - » Organization thrives in seeking to be the very best
- **Best practices**
  - » Adopts and implements standards, procedures, equipment, and training above and beyond regulatory requirements
- **Basic regulatory compliance**
  - » Meets spirit of regulations, but no higher
- **Sub-standard performance**
  - » non-adherence to regulations, cutting corners are the norm

Adopted from Pete Agur



## What is Leadership?

“Leadership is about influence.  
Nothing more. Nothing less.”

- John Maxwell

2



## How leaders influence safety

“The safety behaviors and attitudes of individuals are influenced by their perceptions and expectations about safety in their work environment, and they pattern their safety behaviors to meet demonstrated priorities of organizational leaders, regardless of stated policies.”

- Dov Zohar, as cited in NTSB accident report



## Three leadership questions

- 1) Is safety the top priority of Patriot Rail?
- 2) Do you have a good safety culture?
- 3) Are you on the right track?



## 1) Is safety the top priority of Patriot Rail?



### Priority or Core Value?

“Safety culture is the core values and behaviors resulting from a collective commitment by leaders and individuals to emphasize safety over competing goals to ensure protection of people and the environment.”

Source: U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission



## 2) Do you have a good safety culture?



## Do you have a good safety culture?

- “... it is worth pointing out that if you are convinced that your organization has a good safety culture, you are almost certainly mistaken.”
- “... a safety culture is something that is striven for but rarely attained...”
- “...the process is more important than the product.”

– James Reason, “Managing the Risks of Organizational Accidents.”



### 3) Are you on the right track?



### Are you on the right track?

“Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.”



- Will Rogers



A Word of Caution:

# NEVER EVER BELIEVE GOOD NEWS



The collage features three newspaper front pages from USA Today. The left page, dated January 12, 2009, has headlines: "Survivors survive weekend", "Airlines record safest 2 years", and "No one killed in crash of a U.S. flight". The right page, dated January 16, 2009, has headlines: "Obama's 'Day One' plan" and "'Miracle on the Hudson'". Below these is a photograph of a crash site with a large piece of debris and a traffic cone. The text "Monday's Headlines January 12, 2009" is positioned below the left page, "Friday's Headlines January 16, 2009" below the right page, and "4 Weeks Later February 12, 2009" below the crash site photo.



## “Good can be Bad”

- With good safety performance, people/organizations can easily become complacent.
- Don't ever believe that a lack of accidents means you are “safe.”
- To counter this complacency, there must be a leadership obsession with continuous improvement.

- Courtesy of Jim Schultz



## Continuing the Journey to Safety Culture

-  1. Management Commitment and Emphasis
2. Culture of Compliance
3. Continuous Learning and Risk Awareness
4. Just Culture & Trust



## Management Commitment

### Management commitment and emphasis on safety

- Safety begins at top of organization
- Safety permeates the entire operation



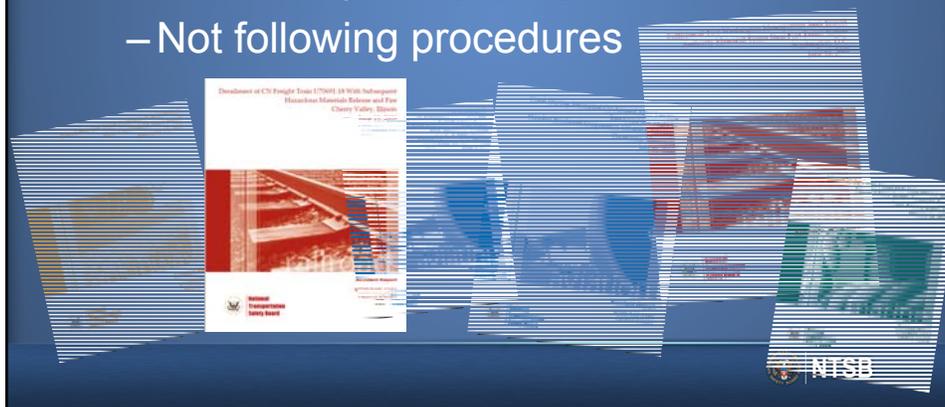
## Continuing the Journey to Safety Culture

1. Management Commitment and Emphasis
-  2. Culture of Compliance
3. Continuous Learning and Risk Awareness
4. Just Culture & Trust



## A persuasive problem

- Common factors in accidents investigated by NTSB:
  - Not having adequate procedures
  - Not following procedures



## A Culture of Compliance

- Internal company policies, procedures, rules
- Ethical principles
- Company code of conduct
- Federal, state, and local laws and ordinances
- Industry best practices
- Financial guidelines and principles
- Etc.

A commitment to doing things right.  
Always.

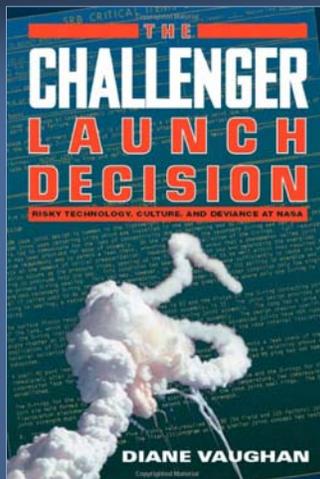
## Avoid Selective Compliance



- “That is a stupid rule.”
- “I don’t have to comply with that one.”



## Avoid “Normalization of Deviance”



- Normalization of Deviance: When not following procedures and taking “short cuts” and becomes an accepted practice.



## Continuing the Journey to Safety Culture

1. Management Commitment and Emphasis
2. Culture of Compliance
-  3. Continuous Learning and Risk Awareness
4. Just Culture & Trust



## Continuous Learning and Risk Awareness

- Organizations with a healthy safety focus are constantly learning.
- They conduct thorough investigations.
- They learn from their mistakes and those of others.
- Information regarding prior incidents and accidents is shared openly and not suppressed.
- They are ever mindful of risks and are looking for ways to mitigate those risks.



## How do you stay informed?

- Internal safety audits
- External safety audits
- Confidential incident reporting systems
- Employee feedback
- MBWA



## Staying informed

- How do you detect and correct performance deficiencies before an accident?
- How do you know what is going on in your operations?
- Do you have multiple data sources?



## Employees



## Are employees comfortable reporting?

- They are open to report safety problems, if they receive assurances that:
  - The information will be acted upon
  - Data are kept confidential or de-identified
  - They will not be punished or ridiculed for reporting



## Continuing the Journey to Safety Culture

1. Management Commitment and Emphasis
2. Culture of Compliance
3. Continuous Learning and Risk Awareness
-  4. Just Culture & Trust



## “Just” Culture

- People realize they will be treated fairly
  - Not all errors and unsafe acts will be punished (if the error was unintentional)
  - Those who act recklessly or take deliberate and unjustifiable risks will be punished



## Just Culture

“An atmosphere of trust in which people are encouraged, even rewarded, for providing essential safety-related information, but in which they are also clear about where the line must be drawn between acceptable and unacceptable behavior.”

- James Reason, Ph.D.  
*Flight Safety Digest*, March 2005



## Three leadership questions

- 1) Is safety the top priority of your organization?
- 2) Do you have a good safety culture?
- 3) Are you on the right track?



## Continuing the Journey to Safety Culture

1. Management Commitment and Emphasis
2. Culture of Compliance
3. Continuous Learning and Risk Awareness
4. Just Culture & Trust



