

SMS... Taking the Plunge!

While the aviation sector is relatively new to Safety Management Systems, a range of industries have been using them for some time now. What can we learn from those industries, and just how important has leadership been?

If the aviation business is all about keeping people comfortable and secure at height, the opposite could be said of bungee jumping.

Despite the inherent risks of throwing people off high things, AJ Hackett Bungee is renowned for the safety record they've built over 30 years.

So good is their record, the Code of Practice they created has become an industry standard in New Zealand and Australia, and is used as a guideline throughout the world.

AJ Hackett Bungee Health and Safety Officer, Malika Rose, knows the value of embedding a safety culture throughout an organisation. So much so, her email signature reads 'Safety... Did it, done it, doing it tomorrow!'

"Safety does have to come from the top down, but it also comes from every angle," says Malika.

"Our Board embraces it and wants everybody to be proactive. We've also got a strong health and safety committee, which is empowered to do good things."

Not only is the health and safety committee empowered, but it is also given the resources and funds to make good ideas happen.

"A couple of our supervisors went out and researched mental health, and ended up running a presentation through the whole business. Their training was adopted across the company, and everybody was able to see the positive results," says Malika.

New staff inductions include a strong health and safety component from day one, which is then repeated 30 days into the role. After 60 days new staff have to give the induction back to the person who inducted them.

AJ Hackett also encourages a strong reporting culture, making it easy for crew to report occurrences through an online interface.

"We talk to the crew and reinforce that reporting is key, rewarding good culture."

"We really push the reporting of near misses, and we investigate them and smaller occurrences. We look for patterns, and regularly give feedback to the crew."

Just Culture is a key tenet of any good Safety Management System, and AJ Hackett are believers. While swift and decisive action is important, so too is fair and just treatment.

"Somebody having a near miss will be drug and alcohol tested, stood down, and retrained if necessary. There's no stigma around that, as long as people have followed process," says Malika.

"If people aren't sticking to procedure, we also question whether the procedure is still correct."

And that's another key to implementing a good SMS. Constantly seeking to improve, and measure success. It's hard to measure accidents that aren't happening, but there are other things you can look at.

"We try and measure our adherence to procedures, and audit how our people are working. We observe them doing their job, and talk to them."

"Last year we went through a gap analysis, from the café to bungee making. We asked, 'what do we do that could hurt people?'"

Watching Generational Change

The local maritime industry, too, has been using Safety Management Systems for more than two decades. Maritime New Zealand's National Compliance Manager, Bruce McLaren, says he's seen real generational change.

"It's really interesting to see a second and third generation in the fishing sector taking SMS on board, without question, while their fathers may have resisted it. There is far less tolerance for risk today, and they're far more open to doing something about it."

"Rather than say, with arms crossed, 'I'm safe all the time', which is what their fathers may have said, the new generation is saying 'I'm as safe as I can be in this high-risk environment, here is the evidence to prove it, and we're constantly looking at ways to improve on this.'"

In 2014, Safe Ship Management (SSM) was replaced by the Maritime Operator Safety Systems (MOSS) – each a mandatory form of Safety Management System. More than 1500 commercial operators are currently in MOSS, and must satisfy Maritime New Zealand that they're meeting its requirements.

"People are often enthusiastic to begin with, and things are put in place, including policies, procedures, training, and supervision. But, a lot of systems fall over at that point. That's as far as they go," says Bruce.

"To close that loop, you must have monitoring, implement an audit process, or ensure there are checks to make sure the people who are meant to be doing things are actually doing them. The lessons learned from those internal checks must be assessed and applied within the SMS."

Bruce stresses the need for strong leadership.

"Chief executives and boards not only have to buy into the SMS, they have to lead it, communicating to the rest of the organisation, 'Hey, we are serious about our Safety Management System and we expect you to be too.'

"The introduction of 'Officer' duties in the new Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 has really helped reinforce this key principle."

The Importance of Leadership

Francois Barton, executive director of the Business Leaders' Health and Safety Forum, says the advantages of embracing SMS are far-reaching.

"Many CEOs take safety walks around their company to signal to their people that safety is a priority – which is great. But increasingly, many business leaders are doing it to actually

learn, not just as a signalling exercise – doing it as a genuine commitment to learn something.

"Take a deep breath and listen to your people. You will learn a lot about your business – what's helping and what's hindering performance... not *just* health and safety."

Compliance is only one reason why health and safety is important.

"Compliance is a reality, but if it's your only goal, you could easily waste time and money – chasing compliance by looking at compliance *only* can be a mirage," he says.

"The legislation is quite deliberately not prescriptive. People think there are a bunch of boxes to check and a bunch of accreditation labels to possess, and therefore that equals safety. A phone book of paper is not going to keep people safe," says Francois.

"It's critical there's buy-in from the top. Leadership drives culture and culture drives performance. What interests the boss fascinates the team.

"But make sure leadership focus is on people and managing the risks to keep them safe - don't just tick a box." ■



Photo courtesy of AJ Hackert Bungy.