



Wag of the Finger or Tip of the Hat?

“Treat a man as he is and he will remain as he is. Treat a man as he can and should be and he will become as he can and should be.” - Johann von Goethe

In a previous article “Is Discipline a Corrective Action?” we discussed the pitfalls around discipline when it is applied in conjunction with incident investigations. In that article, we promised to address the question of whether reward or punishment is a better method for an individual to learn lessons. The answer might be surprising.

B.F. Skinner, noted psychologist, defined reward, also known as reinforcement, as something done to increase the likelihood of a behavior. Punishment is defined by Skinner as something done to decrease the likelihood of a behavior.

Reinforcement can be positive (adding something) or negative (stopping something). For example, positive reinforcement might be giving praise after a task is completed successfully. Negative reinforcement might be to stop castigating a perpetually tardy employee who starts arriving early to work.

Discipline

In the U.S., there is another potential consequence when an organization disciplines employees after an injury incident. Punishment following an OSH Act protected activity such as reporting an injury could result in a discrimination based citation and fine against the employer.

Punishment can also be positive or negative. An example of positive punishment is receiving a reprimand when caught working without following a known company policy. An example of negative punishment is taking away safety bonuses when the number of near-miss incident reports decrease below an acceptable threshold.



This is where the ABC model (antecedent → behavior → consequence) can be useful. Knowing what precipitates a behavior, and what consequences will reinforce or stop that behavior, helps managers and supervisors to achieve the desired outcomes from their employees.

Whether using punishments or rewards, care must be taken that the right things are measured. When people are punished or rewarded for things over which they have no control, it causes reductions in morale and productivity.

Those U.S. companies that provide safety bonuses based on decreases in incident frequency rates are often baffled that it has no noticeable effect on the number of serious incidents. Rewarding based on a lower recordable rate means hearing about less of the minor incidents which can be hidden or ‘case managed’ out of

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view, which means not finding out about problems until they have escalated.

Returning to the original question of which is more effective, reward or punishment, management theory would say that reinforcement is the key. In contrast, most psychologists say that punishment is more effective in the short term. Studies have shown that adults learn a task more quickly when shown their mistakes than when praised for their efforts.

The truth is somewhere in the middle – both rewards and punishments have a place at work, provided they are based on measurement of the right things and are delivered at the right time.

V Types of Unpreventable Unplanned Events

“All accidents are preventable” is a common mantra at many organizations. Many people believe this to be true and will doggedly defend this concept against all proof to the contrary. Unpalatable as it may be, the fact is that there exists a small population of incidents that are not preventable, falling into several broad categories.



<http://www.hdwallpapersinn.com/hd-lightning-wallpaper.html>

I Acts of nature: This is the most obvious type of unpreventable incident, as everyone knows and acknowledges that it is impossible to control Mother Nature. Lightning will strike, animals will attack, and in many cases the best that can be done is to mitigate the consequences. Being a repository of thousands of real-life incident reports, we at vPSI Group have seen and heard it all. From the swan that drowned an apartment security guard, to the lightning strike that cost a refinery millions of dollars, nature in all its glorious forms is often catastrophic to those in its path.

II Third parties: Vehicle accidents are a common example of this type of unplanned event. There are no corporate measures that can be taken to prevent, for example, non-employees from running red lights and causing accidents. Though a company's employees can be taught defensive driving, there is no guarantee that they will be able to both realize an accident is imminent and have enough time and control to take the necessary measures to avoid being involved.

III Human error: In “Number Crunching,” a previous article, we referenced the research around human error rates. It is generally accepted that humans make an average of 5 to 10 mistakes per hour when doing routine work, with some degree of variance related to stress levels. Due to resource constraints and the rules of logic, these errors cannot all be engineered out; after all, engineering is a human activity subject to the same potential error rates. It is true that not all of these errors have the potential to result in a significant loss, but as the common analogy goes, sometimes the holes in the cheese align, resulting in a nasty surprise.

IV Extremely complex processes resulting in an incident: When the proverbial holes in the cheese do align, 20/20 hindsight allows us to easily identify the point of origin and say, “Yes, that caused this problem.” On the flip side of that coin, it's often impossible to be at that point of origin and predict the future alignment of the cheesy holes and the resulting unplanned event. If a potential problem

cannot be anticipated, it cannot be prevented.

V Semi-Predictable Failures: It is not economically feasible to engineer a guaranteed zero in-service failure rate for physical plant. Even after extensive testing and generation of item-specific Weibull curves, there will always exist the possibility that a short time failure will occur, potentially leading to an unplanned event.

Of course, there is another category of unplanned events that, while technically preventable, the organization has opted not to prevent while still loudly proclaiming that all accidents are preventable. We call this category Corporate Schizophrenia (CS). The reader who believes their organization does not suffer from CS is referred to their corporate risk matrix, where in many organizations the acceptable zone includes some potentially disastrous events, such as fatalities. Remember, just because something is considered low probability does not mean it won't happen. It just means you're allowed to be surprised when it does.

Next time our readers are discussing the “all accidents are preventable” mantra with one of its dogged defenders, feel free to call on vPSI Group to help make the alternate case. After all, as risk management radicals, we are used to people not liking what we have to say.

Castles Built on Sand

As the "corrective action company," vPSI Group is in the unique position of being able to examine thousands of incidents and recognize the commonalities and differences amongst them. One thing this perspective provides is the ability to see gaps in the process. One such gap is in post-incident data collection.

In teaching classes on creating and evaluating corrective actions, it has become evident that while many of the students attending have been trained in so-called "root-cause analysis" techniques, few

have ever received training in the necessary foundational step: acquiring good quality evidence after an unplanned event. What they know has generally been gleaned from watching "CSI" on television.

Poor quality data does not provide an adequate basis for an investigative effort. Corrective actions can only be as good as the understanding of cause and effect relationships allows, and that in itself is completely dependent on the underlying data and evidence. Castles built on sand will not stand.

vPSI has developed a two-day workshop to address this gap, complementing vPSI Group's existing training portfolio. The workshop is designed for those front-line personnel likely to be on hand at the location of the event and focuses on gathering witness statements, conducting interviews, and the acquisition and preservation of high-value evidence and data.



Ultimate Sand Castle by Jon on Flickr

Combining Business with Pleasure

vPSI consultants travel extensively in the course of their work and, wherever possible, try to fit in some pleasure alongside their serious business.

Have we mentioned we like food? Most of us at vPSI Group are acknowledged foodies. Our latest round of offerings in the Combining Business with Pleasure category is centered around some of the fantastic restaurants we've indulged in since the last issue of our newsletter.



Photo used with permission of Café Vermilionville

Café Vermilionville in Lafayette, Louisiana, is a testament to Louisiana tradition and delicious gourmet food.

Impeccable service and eclectic architecture put this restaurant on our must-visit list.

Another gourmet favorite is the Silly Goose in Nashville, Tennessee. Relatively new to the culinary scene, having just opened in October 2009, this unique suburban locale offers such treats as Melon Gazpacho and Honey Beet Ice Cream, which both taste phenomenally better than they might sound to a food noob. Finally, not to be missed is Lumière in Newton,

Massachusetts, where Chef Michael Leviton magically combines classic bistro elements, modern cooking techniques, and local and sustainable ingredients.

Though we are foodies, we're not food snobs; our top places also include delicious food of the non-gourmet variety. One of the best kept secrets in the New Orleans area is Fisherman's Cove Seafood / Harbor Seafood and Oyster Bar in Kenner. Another of our top picks is Randol's Restaurant in Lafayette, Louisiana which offers great Cajun comfort food with live Zydeco music.

The Rock and Sole Plaice is a world famous fish and chips restaurant in London with a well-earned reputation. Finally, Jack's Bar-B-Q in Nashville, Tennessee offers world-class barbeque and a variety of sauces for comparison. Folks at vPSI Group were torn between the Kansas City Style and the Tennessee Original.



Photo used with permission of Lumière



Photo used with permission of Jack's BBQ

More vPSI travel photos can be found on our Facebook page.



Patent No Longer Pending



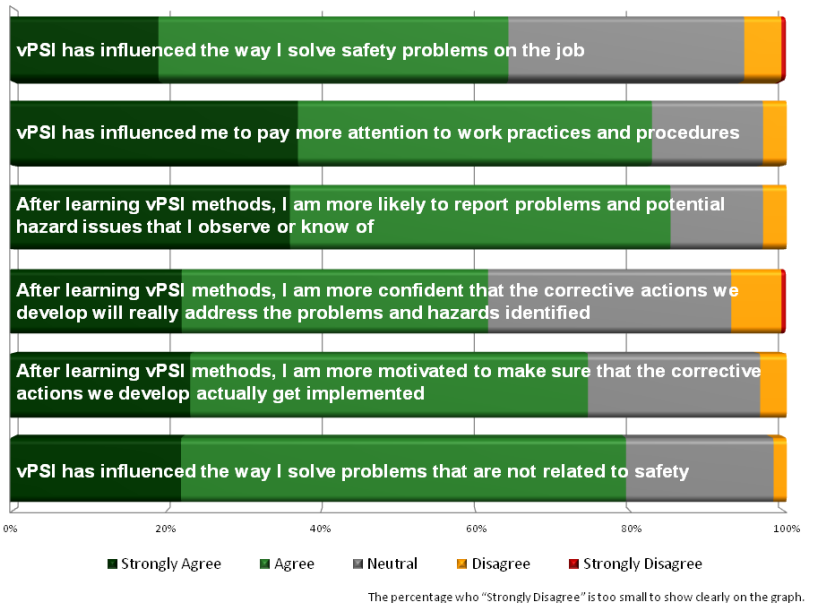
Terry L. McCutcheon, Patent Attorney with Matthews Lawson, PLLC, and Norman Ritchie, Director of vPSI Group, LLC

After 6 years and countless pages of paper, vPSI received a patent titled, "System And Method For Creating And Maintaining Pre-Task Planning Documents" (Patent Number US 8,489,545 B2), for our online JSA library system. This cloud-based tool provides all the functionality necessary for an effective pre-task planning system, whether for permitting, hazard analysis, safety analysis, tool box talks, etc. Users can access and modify the 300+ existing pre-task plans or create their own using the "wizard" included in the tool. This tool is completely free to use for individual subscribers.

Of course, not all pre-task plans are created equal and many are not worth the paper they're printed on (or the digital space they occupy). The highest value vPSI's online tool provides is the one key ingredient of an effective pre-task plan: a mechanism to cause a change in how things are done in real life. The tool requires that users identify a specific task to assign to a specific person to prevent exposure to dangers identified in the pre-task planning process.

How vPSI Impacts Users

vPSI training participants are surveyed several weeks after each training class is held. The collected data, shown to the right, reveals a willingness to set aside conventional thinking about safety and change their thoughts, behaviors, and procedures to more effectively investigate unplanned events, to develop effective corrective actions, and to help others do the same. This signals the beginning stages of a changed work philosophy and culture shift that will lead to an environment of "maximum improvement" rather than "minimum harm."



55% of our survey participants are supervisors, and 45% have more than 15 years of experience (see the chart on the left). They have been exposed to numerous programs during their careers. As a result, they are the employees most likely to suffer from "initiative fatigue" and to resist new concepts, such as those presented by vPSI System™ training. The high percentage of "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" responses indicates the positive impact of vPSI even in this hard-to-reach segment of the workplace demographic.