

Selling Safety to Management Using Metrics

Paul A. Esposito, CSP, CIH
STAR Consultants, Inc.
Annapolis, MD 21401

Safety and health professionals are constantly challenged by management to justify their safety and health programs and initiatives. Goals and objectives need to be communicated and understood to create buy-in and ownership. Using metrics, determining meaningful prospective data that management can understand rather than just injury and illness data, has proven to be an effective selling strategy. So, what prospective data is simple enough that most safety and health professionals can collect and analyze the data?

Safety and health goals and objectives (initiatives) are often presented to management based on subjective regulatory interpretations. Retrospective safety data is sometimes used to justify positions and recommendations. However, it is typically restricted to injury and illness historical data. More effective is prospective and program evaluation data, collected or used to drive corrective action plans, to sell management on these objectives while justifying budget requests.

One of the major challenges in developing the data or metric approach is determining the meaningful prospective data that management can understand, while being simple enough that most safety and health professionals can collect and analyze the data.

How is this problem(s) solved? A presentation outline was developed by a number of Fortune 500 companies, where data and metrics are presented as an Annual Report. Analysis of prospective and retrospective safety and health data, that supports and drives corrective action plans (initiatives). By using prospective data, complimented by the retrospective data, management was more convinced that the safety and health manager was truly aware of program issues, and had done their homework in designing and cost-effective, prioritized approach toward the goal and objective setting process.

OUTLINE FOR A DATA PRESENTATION

- **Last Year Plan and Accomplishments**

To begin, most companies set the stage on a positive note, listing what was accomplished. For companies with strategic plans, integrating top accomplishments by comparing them to corporate initiatives demonstrates that health and safety managers understand the business and can relate program value to accepted corporate values. This is also a great opportunity to show management where the budget was spent the past year.

Part of this listing may also be contribution of others. For example, if there is an active safety committee, publish their membership and acknowledge their contributions.

- **Historical Data Analysis**

Next, consider presenting injury and illness trends. Most managers want you to get to the bottom line, and you want to be able to take credit for success and explain negative trends. Sometimes, based on the size of your facility or population base, three and five year averages or trends better demonstrate history. If you have workers compensation \$\$\$, insert here.

- **Historical Metrics**

Here is where safety and health professionals can really demonstrate their value to an organization. Most safety and health organizations perform numerous duties throughout the year. Duties such as inspections, industrial hygiene surveys, MSDS reviews, IAQ assessments, ergonomic studies, fire drills, accident investigation, etc. We have seen effective organizations use this data to their advantage to demonstrate value to the company.

For example, you may be able to demonstrate the hearing conservation program has been successful in reducing the total population of exposed individuals by 10% over 3 years. Alternatively, you may be able to demonstrate that you performed 80 more ergonomic surveys, resulting in 92 more corrective actions this year, demonstrating where you spent your resources. Hopefully, your injury statistics validate the efforts.

Data and metrics are best presented as trends. Use at least some comparative data (last 2-3 years) to clearly relate how much has been done or what has been accomplished. Even better, if the number or trends are not complimentary, use this an opportunity to request and justify additional resources.

- **Program Assessment Metrics**

One of the most impressive metrics to present continues to be a program assessment result, presented as a score or ranking. More and more, companies are evaluating their programs or management system annually. One year's scores are less meaningful, unless used to convey relative strengths and weaknesses. Trends, depicting a progression of program or element scores over a period of a few years, can have a powerful effective on management and lend further credibility and justification to proposed initiatives.

- **Next Year's Action Plan**

As a result of this metrics presentation (a.k.a., data dump), we finally get the point and present the action plan for next year. Based on the weakness presented in each previous section, there is usually some consistent problem area(s) or department(s) that are struggling to meet requirements. Specify what specific initiatives will allow you to improve trends for next year?

- **Budget and Resources**

Last but not least, ask for help. Make sure management realizes they need to contribute dollars, and other resources such as time, training, use of consultants, etc. Take the opportunity to assign a suggested partner in other organizations (e.g., ask Human Resources

Reprinted from: Esposito, P. *“Selling Safety to Management Using Metrics”*, June 2002, Industrial Hygiene and Safety News.

for the performance appraisal format, or maintenance to improve their closure rate on safety maintenance work orders).

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

One of the biggest reasons for failure is the inability of safety professionals to define their goals and objectives to the same extent as the rest of the business. While most other departments publish simple numeric or descriptive targets, safety professionals often do not realize that there are teams of managers and other professionals spending meeting after meeting drafting detailed action plans to define and meet these objectives. Line managers are actually held accountable to these action plans. The published goals are just a form of communication to the workforce, client, stockholder, etc. Likewise, safety goals of “10% reduction” or “Zero injuries” are nice to hear, but completely meaningless in terms of describing what people will do to be better than last year. These are better described as “visions” rather than goals.

If goals were actually stated more as a combination of numeric and descriptive:

- Numerical Goals - Numerical goals are easily measured, but it can be difficult to make them attainable and comprehensive
- Descriptive Goals - Descriptive goals tend to be attainable and comprehensive, but are more difficult to measure.
- Integrating - Setting Descriptive goals which are then measurable through numerical objectives is an effective way to integrate descriptive and numerical elements. It could be said that they provide better detail, and a measurable point.

The more descriptive they are, with measurables, the more meaningful they are to each person, and people may be able to see how they can contribute. For example:

Goal: Improve our Hazard Identification & Hazard Reduction. "Conduct weekly inspections with emphasis on good housekeeping, proper use of protective equipment, condition of critical parts of equipment, and preventive maintenance."

The next step is to develop action plans, especially for your more strategic initiatives, or where multiple parties may be needed to achieve success. These action plans will typically detail the who's and where's, the how's and why's, so that accountability can be truly evaluated. In addition, items like “critical parts” from the example above will need to be defined, and a method developed to measure and track the goal being accomplished. The better companies use this as an opportunity to demonstrate that they run safety just like other parts of their business.

Reprinted from: Esposito, P. "*Selling Safety to Management Using Metrics*", June 2002, Industrial Hygiene and Safety News.

SUMMARY

In summary, our clients learn that they can more easily communicate, gain acceptance, and even request commitment from management for safety and health goals and objectives by using prospective data and metrics. More importantly, budgets and resources are better defined and determined, and management commitments are more substantial, as they better trust that the safety and health manager can measure whether or not the monies spent can actually accomplish or meet goals.