How to Effectively Report OHS to Executives and Influence Decision-Making

Communicating up the chain of command is one of the most challenging skills for any OHS manager. The executive team cares about safety, but they also juggle financial performance, operational efficiency, and strategic planning. If safety leaders want to get real buy-in for their initiatives, they need to speak in a language executives understand—one that ties OHS efforts directly to business outcomes.

Quarterly meetings are a critical opportunity to showcase the impact of your safety program, highlight emerging risks, and secure the support needed to drive meaningful change. But walking into that meeting with a list of incidents and compliance updates isn't enough. The key is **framing your report strategically, using metrics that matter, and presenting a forward-thinking plan that aligns with the organization's broader goals**.

Framing Your Quarterly OHS Report for Executives

The executive team doesn't need to hear about every safety initiative in detail. They need to know **how safety impacts the business**—financially, operationally, and reputationally. Your report should be **structured, concise, and focused on insights, not just data.**

Start by answering three fundamental questions:

1. **What has happened in the last quarter?** (Performance metrics, trends, major incidents).
2. **What does this mean for the company?** (Impact on costs, productivity, legal risk, reputation).
3. **What’s next?** (Planned initiatives, emerging risks, and the support needed to improve safety outcomes).

Presenting Metrics That Matter

Executives want data-driven insights, not just numbers. That means focusing on **metrics that tie safety performance to business performance.**

Go Beyond Lagging Indicators

Yes, you need to report on traditional safety statistics like total recordable incident rate (TRIR), lost-time injury frequency rate (LTIFR), and workers’ compensation claims. But these are **lagging indicators**—they only tell you what has already happened. To demonstrate proactive safety leadership, include **leading indicators** that help predict and prevent future risks.

For example:

- **Near-miss reporting trends** – Are employees identifying and reporting hazards before they lead to incidents?
- **Safety training completion rates** – Are workers receiving and retaining critical safety knowledge?
- **Corrective action closure rates** – When issues are identified, how quickly are they resolved?

A report that combines lagging and leading indicators paints a **complete picture** of the organization’s safety performance and its trajectory.

Tie Safety Metrics to Financial and Operational Impact

Executives need to see how safety affects the bottom line. Quantify cost savings from injury prevention efforts, reductions in workers' compensation premiums, or productivity gains from a safer work environment. Instead of just saying, *"We reduced incidents by 20%,"* translate that into business terms:

"This reduction in incidents saved the company an estimated $250,000 in direct costs and improved productivity by reducing lost workdays."

This kind of reporting transforms safety from a compliance issue into a **strategic advantage**.

Communicating the Safety Plan for the Year Ahead

A strong quarterly report doesn't just look backward—it also **lays out the safety strategy for the rest of the year.** This is where project management skills come into play.

Use a Project Management Approach

Executives expect clear, actionable plans with defined timelines, measurable goals, and accountable parties. Presenting safety initiatives in a structured project management format—outlining objectives, key milestones, required resources, and expected outcomes—helps position safety as a **business function with strategic value.**

For example, if you're launching a company-wide safety leadership program, break it down into:

- **Phase 1: Leadership training (Q2)** – Train managers on safety coaching techniques.
- **Phase 2: Frontline engagement (Q3)** – Implement peer-led safety mentorships.
- **Phase 3: Measurement and refinement (Q4)** – Evaluate effectiveness and adjust based on employee feedback.

This approach not only **demonstrates foresight and structure** but also makes it easier for executives to understand how safety initiatives fit into the company’s broader strategy.

Communicating Issues That Need Immediate Attention

Not all safety reports are about celebrating progress—sometimes, you need to bring urgent risks or challenges to the executive team’s attention. The way you frame these issues **determines whether you get the support you need or face resistance.**

Be Solution-Oriented

Executives don’t just want to hear about problems; they want to hear solutions. Instead of presenting an issue as a crisis, frame it as an opportunity for proactive action.

For example, instead of saying:
“We have a serious problem with compliance in our maintenance department. Safety audits show that 40% of employees aren’t wearing required PPE.”

Say:
“We’ve identified a PPE compliance gap in the maintenance department, with 40% non-compliance. To address this, we propose a targeted training campaign and an updated enforcement policy, which can reduce incidents and improve compliance within the next quarter.”

This approach positions you as a **problem-solver** rather than just a messenger of bad news.

Use Risk Assessments to Justify Action

If an issue requires funding or executive approval, back it up with a **risk assessment**. Highlight the **likelihood** and **severity** of potential consequences and compare the **cost of inaction** to the cost of implementing a solution.

For example:

“If this issue is not addressed, we estimate an increased risk of serious injury, which could lead to $500,000 in workers’ compensation claims over the next year. By investing $50,000 in improved training and PPE compliance measures now, we can significantly reduce this risk.”

Executives respond to **clear cost-benefit analysis**, especially when safety investments align with financial savings and risk reduction.

Building Credibility as an OHS Leader

The most effective OHS managers aren’t just safety experts—they’re skilled communicators who understand how to **translate safety data into business strategy.** The more you can position safety as a driver of operational excellence, cost savings, and workforce engagement, the more influence you’ll have at the executive level.

Final Thoughts: How to Make Your Reports Stand Out

- **Keep it concise and data-driven**—Executives don’t have time for lengthy reports filled with minor details. Focus on high-level insights.
- **Speak their language**—Tie safety performance to financial impact, risk management, and strategic objectives.
- **Offer clear solutions**—When presenting problems, always provide an action plan with measurable outcomes.
- **Use visuals**—Graphs, charts, and dashboards make data more digestible than walls of text.
- **Be proactive**—Don’t wait for executives to ask about safety—bring forward insights that help shape the company’s future.

By mastering the art of **strategic safety communication**, OHS managers can move beyond compliance and become **key influencers in shaping a safer, stronger organization.**

So, next time you walk into that executive meeting, ask yourself: *Am I just reporting on safety, or am I driving the conversation forward?*