

Safety and Change or Philosophy for Beginners



By Barbara Semeniuk, BSc CRSP – I confess. I can be a barnacle on the derriere of change. I don't like change because I have ossified with age and am attached to the rock of stasis. "This is the way we have always done it." "If it ain't, broke don't fix it." "You can't teach old dogs new tricks." These sayings were the bedrock of my existence until I ran into Enform, the oil and gas certifying partner. They live for change. For example, they've had three different audit systems in the course of three years—each tougher than the last to learn.

Therefore, I decided to pursue philosophy to guide me through the tides of change. *The Lazy Man's Guide to Enlightenment* describes the need to think of ourselves as either expansive—that is, flowing outward from our souls like light, airy and bright—or protective of what we have—that is, contracting until we become a black hole, distrusting everyone and everything. All of us are on a continuum between these two extremes, ranging from feeling good, energetic and open to being negative, exhausted and drained by people and work.

Safety programs and systems can also be expansive and open. For example, in our workplace, people look out for one another. It's an actively caring environment here! (Thanks to Scott Geller for this term.)

However, many OHS programs, particularly the larger ones, are governed by the philosophy of protecting one's assets and often result in safety rules on steroids! For example, I think of the poor surveyor who on, a very warm summer's day, had to wear a heavy hard hat because it was the client's rule even though he was in an open field where no danger to his head existed. In this situation, this rule wasn't logical and denigrated safety—resulting in a negative attitude connected with OHS programs and/or safety personnel.

Listen to your workers to determine if you're expanding or contracting with regards to safety. Overkill in health and safety, in my opinion, is just as bad as too little safety. Safety should always be part of any job. You should encourage an attitude toward creating environments that are healthy and good places in which to work. Safety shouldn't be a barrier to being productive and efficient at work.

Therefore, when we're open and expansive, we aren't afraid of change and embrace

it as part of life and growth. When we're contracting, we want to protect what we have and so see change as a threat. We embrace the status quo and will fight hard to maintain it. This attitude can lead to the rise of safety rules for their own sake—a bureaucratic safety program!

As a result of my studies, I decided that I didn't want to be part of a health and safety program that's ossified. Thus, to handle the Enform audits, I'll take a course (or several) on how to deal with the new protocol and restrict my efforts to existing clients until I've perfected it.

Wow! I can feel the energy that I've held onto too tight expanding outwards. Is this some sort of safety nirvana? Have I become one with the auditing universe? This way of looking at your state of being can apply to almost anything in life.....USE IT WELL!

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