Tatiana Fogaça Rios

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With a passion for cultural transformation and change management, Tatiana Fogaça Rios explains how effective safety management is critical to the overall culture and performance of a company.

Q.

How would you describe how you developed an interest in workplace safety, and how has this influenced your current role?

Actually, I did not choose safety, but I applied for an internship in a great company and the position was in a safety consultancy area, with a focus on cultural change. What first caught my attention as something new, was the direct relationship between culture and safety performance. In my first day at work, I was surprised to see the importance everyone gave to safety rules and how in time, I got naturally embedded in that culture and I was able to acquire those safety values as well and for the realisation that "culture" can be implemented and taught. It soon became clear to me that safety is all about selling and embedding a culture in every employee. It's about creating leadership and cultural changes and this is what I'm passionate about, especially cultural transformation. I've always liked methods and processes and so managing safety ticked all the boxes for me and became my chosen career path. It covers so many aspects of business, and understanding the components helps us to achieve everything, you can have better discipline, a better company, a better organisation. Ultimately, safety touches everything including HR, communication and maintenance. I truly believe that's the baseline and I am fortunate to be in a role where I bring all the elements together.

Q.

You've touched on how changing mindsets and behaviours is an important driver of safety excellence. In terms of leadership, what in your view is key to the success of safety in the workplace?

Genuine caring leadership is vital and positively impacts the whole team and company. Everybody knows what they are meant to say, or what should be visible on a company website. The difficulty comes in finding out if the values are actually real. Health and safety should always be a priority for a company, but it can be rare to find leaders that really care, and I'm delighted to be surrounded by them at my current company. It's not about companies, it's about leaders. Companies can have a lot of values, but what makes the biggest impact is a leader who genuinely cares. When it comes to safety, it's always a demand. But consistent and genuine communication is key. It's also important to recognise that leaders not only need to care, but they also need to have an understanding of cultural change. You can drive cultural transformation through leadership, and we can transform leadership through safety.

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Q.

Talking of cultural change, in what way has COVID-19 impacted your role? Have you seen a significant shift towards psychosocial risks such as mental health issues?

There's no doubt that the pandemic has put health and safety in the spotlight. Companies are having to adapt because everyone has been affected to some degree. I know that this is something we need to pay more attention to. We now have new ways or working which need different tactics. For example, we need to consider how we can reach people who work from home and how can we manage wellbeing? It's a steep learning curve and we are still learning how to manage the demands and stress. We have right now several campaigns around "its ok not to be ok" and wellbeing tools made available to employees. Within my team, what I'm personally doing is to try and normalise discussions around struggling with mental health, stress and anxiety. If we try to instigate these discussions within teams then hopefully, we can support each other by being open and honest about how we're feeling. At the same time, we need to recognise that there are gaps. If I look at our maintenance crews, who are predominantly male, research shows that males are more prone to mental health issues but also more reluctant to talk about their experiences. So how do we address this? We are definitely making progress, but we've still a way to go and covid has made us address this.

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Q.

Based on your own experience, what would you say are the key practices to focus on when building a safety program?

I believe it's all based on creating a consistent culture and to achieve this I always quote Kotter's 8 steps of change, the first step of which is to build a sense of urgency and a powerful coalition, and not to move onto the next step until you have buy-in from management. Each step needs validating before moving on. This process is all about initiating the change, managing the change, and then sustaining the change. This is exactly what needs to be the focus of any safety program. When it comes to safety leadership training it is not about the safety, but about culture i.e., what does culture look like? How can we change culture? How can we motivate people? Ultimately communication is not enough. Visible commitment is key, it's not about what a leaders say, it's about what people see them doing that matters.

> The first step in creating a successful safety program is to build a sense of urgency and a powerful coalition, and not to move onto the next step until you have buy-in from management.

Q.

What would be your key message to other women looking to progress in health and safety roles?

A successful safety professional, unlike other technical roles that can work in a more or less independent way, is required to work with others at every stage of the process. So what accounts for success is not the technical information per se, but how the professional communicates, how the information is framed and the strategies they employ to gain and retain professional credibility with their various constituencies.

My advice for career progression would be to take time to educate yourself in techniques and tools that are critical for a successful performance, like project management, training and communication skills, negotiation and influence techniques, coaching skills, change management, financials, etc. Those would provide a more complete set of skills to drive successful cultural transformations and implementation projects and also enable you to coach and manage successful and skilled teams.

And If I need to choose one action as key for success, not only in safety, that would be to identify your stakeholders, empathise and understand their motivations and expectations and keep them in the loop.

Q.

What role does innovation and technological advances play in safety learning?

From my point of view, it's not about the tools we have but more about how we use them effectively. I recently read an interesting article around the issue of people not having their cameras on during online meetings. For the person leading the meeting this was stressful because they couldn't see their body language or know how much interaction was taking place. In other hand, other people feel more comfortable behind a blank screen. So although the technology is great for bringing people together, getting the balance of communication and inclusivity can be difficult. So again, this comes back to the importance of effective management and leadership. If you get that right, then new tools are useful but they can't be effective without effective leadership.

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