



EH&S In Depth: Looking After the Bottom Line

by Richard MacLean

with Paul King, PPG Industries, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Technical competency is only one dimension of an environmental professional's career. Success comes with effectively applying this technical knowledge to your work environment. "EH&S Advisor" is a new EM column that will offer a wide range of tools and techniques to help you become more proficient in your job. The column will provide a monthly forum for environment, health, and safety (EH&S) professionals to share lessons learned from their successes and the challenges that they have overcome.

The EH&S Advisor will have one or two supporting authors from industry, academia, government, and non-government organizations. This serves several purposes. First, co-authors provide expertise, credibility, balance, and contacts for additional information. Second, recognizing contributors encourages readers to join this forum and share their own experiences and tools for working effectively.

A&WMA Immediate Past President Paul King, director, Environment, Health, & Safety Stewardship for PPG Industries, joins me in introducing the column to EM readers.

This, the first article, describes the need for timely EH&S information in today's rapidly changing work environment, provides the ground rules for the potentially controversial material that will appear from time to time, and asks for your feedback and contributions to future articles.

At several universities, I have lectured undergraduate students on the challenges they will face in the work environment. Early into the discussion, I give them a one-page "real-world exam" and ask them, among other questions, to rank their proficiency in the following skills in terms of long-range significance to their professional

careers: (1) math and science, (2) writing, (3) engineering, and (4) golf. Inevitably, the liberal arts majors pick (1) or (2), and the engineers pick (3). Option (4) is, of course, the throwaway, making the four-choice question a three-part one while simultaneously providing amusement and stress relief while taking the test. Or is it?

One may reasonably assume that very senior and successful professionals in positions to which these students aspire would pick the "correct answer." I have given this test to dozens of successful professionals and they uniformly and without hesitation pick (4). They recognize that "golf" represents the forum where key social and professional interactions take place. It may be jogging or boating in some organizations, but they know that the discussions that involve or take place during these activities can be essential. "How was the golf game on Sunday, Judy? By the way, what's the status of the new proposal?"

The realization that implementation skills based on life experiences and interpersonal adeptness can be determining factors in success or failure may be disturbing to an EH&S professional beginning his or her career with four or more years of technical training. To senior professionals, it is a fact of life. The successful ones have built networks and mentoring systems to learn these techniques taught not in universities, but in the "College of Hard Knocks." This column will provide an opportunity for EM readers to broaden their support networks.

The challenges faced in the work environment continue to grow. We, and for that matter, all professions, are facing relentless demands to add value or be cut. The three-part series just completed in the

July issue of EM on "Right-Sizing Organizations for Quality" directly addressed the question of organization cutbacks. The strong feedback from this series was one element in our decision to begin this column. Another key element was our ongoing discussions with A&WMA members who are under enormous pressure to do more with fewer resources.

There can also be secondary and unintended consequences from doing more with less. For example, the need to press on with "getting the job done" can create a myopic view of available options at a time when there are tremendous, innovative opportunities. Additionally, the concern over job security and future cutbacks may lead some EH&S professionals to use only proven, "safe" options rather than new, potentially more efficient but riskier courses of action. Worse yet, these fears can lead to inaction. Clearly, now is the time to be efficient and effective in how we apply our technical knowledge.

ABOUT THIS COLUMN

Future articles will focus on how to work more effectively with your management team, especially non-EH&S management. The column will cover a broad range of subjects and targeted audiences. Although a number of EH&S technical topics will be covered, the emphasis will be on implementation issues, not on the technical or regulatory aspects of this material. How often have you said this to yourself and others, "The technical challenges are easy. We know exactly what to do. Now if I could just get past the internal politics and communication issues."

Some articles will not deal with EH&S issues at all, but with emerging

POSSIBLE EH&S TOPICS

Tools and Techniques

University Partnerships
External Advisory Committees
EH&S Team Meetings
EH&S Management Models

Strategy

Environmental Disclosure
Due Diligence
Property Transactions

Career

Professional Networking
Doing Business Abroad
Executive Management Presentations
Training Programs
Individual Development

Business Systems

Scenario Development
Enterprise Systems
Supply Chain Management

business trends that may directly or indirectly pose major opportunities or challenges. Other articles will cover such issues as career advice and professional development (see list accompanying this column). Entire books have been written on some of these topics; we will focus on recent implementation issues.

In summary, these articles are designed to help you:

- Understand the dynamics that influence the management decision process
- Identify emerging trends and provide contacts for additional information
- Avoid implementation pitfalls
- Share successes and “war stories” with your colleagues
- Raise potentially controversial issues or approaches for discussion within your organization

CAUTION!

Unlike technical or regulatory material, where there is frequently a right or wrong approach, this column will

cover material that is often a matter of opinion. Some recommendations might be only applicable in certain organizations and even then only under specific conditions. We may include a “disclaimer” specifying the extenuating circumstances or limitations of the recommendations. Some of these articles will (and should) spark healthy debate. Some may even include an opposing view from a contributing author. Much of the material will be most directly applicable to readers working within corporations. However, nearly all of the articles will have a broader application within other organizations.

SHARE AND PROVIDE FEEDBACK

Up to this point we have described why implementation skills are critical for success and how this column will help spread this knowledge among *EM* readers. We recognize that you, *EM* readers, are continuously generating the very best material, and we ask that you contact us and help us make this column current and relevant to all A&WMA members. You may wonder, why should I share this material, information that may give our company a competitive advantage? What’s in it for my organization?

Historically, organizations have been very open in sharing environmental management strategies, tools, and techniques. We see no change in this openness, in spite of increasing global competition. Protecting the environment is not a zero-sum game consisting of winners and losers. If one company creates significant environmental problems, we all lose; there are no winners. The public does not usually distinguish among companies in an industry, and it may hold all companies in the same negative view as the worst performer.

Competitive advantage can, of course, be gained through more efficient, less wasteful, and safer process technology. But this column is not

about sharing proprietary technology or systems that took millions of dollars to develop; it is about how to implement these newer technologies and systems. Competitive advantage can also be gained when a company embraces environmental strategies as part of its core value system. Just as in business strategies like GE’s “Six-Sigma,” the concepts can be very simple and very public. Volvo’s product safety focus and Interface Corporation’s recycling concepts are obvious EH&S examples.

What differentiates companies is their ability to get these strategies and management systems successfully implemented and ingrained into the culture. In this respect, this column is all about competitive advantage. Organizations have learned that being open about their EH&S successes builds trust and confidence with their shareholders, the community, and customers. It is a strategy for competitive advantage. This column is an opportunity to build your organization’s leadership position. The list of possible EH&S article topics on this page is just a start; the best material will come from A&WMA members like you.

We look forward to hearing from you! ☺

About the Author

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