



Towing the Safety Line at Moran

By Gail Snyder

When a company has operated successfully for over 150 years, it might be easy to believe that all is smooth sailing. However, Moran Towing Corporation, in business since 1860, hasn't remained at the helm of the tugboat industry by being complacent. Sensing complacency in the form of a plateaued, although excellent safety record, Moran's senior leadership started thinking about what continued improvement looks like and how they could make Moran not just world class, but *undeniably* world class. Their search led them to the field of Safety Culture.

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– David Olson

Explaining Moran's mission in layman's terms, David Olson, the company's Behavior-Based Safety Manager, says, "My primary line of work is called *ship assist and escort*. Our tugs meet the ships as they come into the port, escort them to the dock, and help them to the dock until they get tied up and secured. When they're ready to get underway again, we help them get off the dock and out of the harbor. Ships usually have their own propulsion and they're maneuverable when operating at normal speed, but they're not maneuverable enough to navigate tight quarters or narrow channels, especially as they slow down. Our tugs provide the assistance they need and provide a measure of safety to protect the ship, its cargo, the port and the docks they visit. Because these are huge ships, they can't just throw on the brakes, so we'll give them extra stopping and turning power. It's fairly straightforward."

Of course, Olson is only referring to the basic explanation of the tugboat function, because, he acknowledges that when the ships being assisted are massive, the details are far from simple. For example, Moran tugs recently assisted the *MV Zhen Hua 13* into Chesapeake Bay with a bridge clearance of only 10 feet. That ship's cargo consisted of four cranes measuring 14 stories high and weighing in at 1,550 tons each. Moran tugs also took part in a multinational amphibious exercise escorting and docking six U.S. Navy ships and a French helicopter carrier. The tugs are often involved in rescue efforts and have valorously assisted the U.S. Navy for more than a century. These activities are just the tip of the iceberg for an organization that operates in 16 U.S. ports spanning the East and Gulf Coasts from New Hampshire to Mexico.

With 100 tugboats on the water, safety is obviously a priority and Moran has a top-notch



safety record. For example, almost half of the organization's fleet were awarded the 2012 Devlin Award, an award going to all manned merchant vessels that have operated for two or more years without a crew member losing a complete turn at watch due to injury. "They are one of the best in the business when it comes to safety, but they also have people who say, 'We can probably get better,' so my hat's off to them for that," says Don Nielsen, Ph.D., Senior Consultant with Aubrey Daniels International (ADI). Nielsen refers to the fact that, approximately two years ago, Moran began implementation of behavior-based safety (BBS) throughout its fleet. The decision

was made following surveys and assessments of Moran's safety program and culture in the Ship Docking Harbors Division beginning in 2010. "I started with an initial assessment, went to leadership, and said, 'Our safety management system is good.' I had even said that it was a Cadillac system," says Olson. "And yet, it wasn't enough. People were still getting injured. I came to the conclusion that a safety management system wasn't going to be able to make those injuries go away. We couldn't write any more policies or any clearer documents to make things better."

Olson did extensive research on culture, leadership, and inspiring people at the front lines—or in Moran's case, from the *deck plate up*. He talked to those customers and peers Moran most admires and his research led him to articles about behavior-based safety. "That's how I thought we should go because BBS increases levels of engagement, increases peer-to-peer observation, and positive reinforcement," he explains. Company leaders gave him the go-ahead for a BBS assessment, after which Olson had another insight. "After the BBS assessment I felt that it wasn't just safety that we needed to work on. As a matter of fact, I thought we were doing safety pretty well. For any of our efforts to be effective, we needed to work on leadership, communication, best practices, and organizational learning," he says. "We needed to change the way we think about safety and better understand why guys 'do what they do.'" At Olson's recommendation, Moran

asked ADI to help address these areas of concern.

After the president and all the company's vice presidents attended coaching training in Atlanta, all of

"ADI seemed more of a leadership kind of company. They're not just a safety company. And that's exactly how I put it to the senior leadership. We could try to address all of these specific opportunities for improvement identified in the assessment or we could address leadership, which in my mind would make a lot of the individual issues simply disappear or improve," Olson relates.

Moran's tugboat captains attended the workshops as well. Even though it was a logistics nightmare pulling the captains from multiple ports, the end results were very positive. "The guys still talk about this opportunity to get together, talk, and share best practices," says Olson. "These guys live together on the tug for seven to fourteen days at a time. The captain/crew dynamic is one of the strongest aspects of our culture. They naturally look out for, and learn from each other. However, they didn't know that sometimes they were actually encouraging risky behavior or discouraging safe behavior. So the workshops were mainly to get everybody speaking the same language, learning the science of behavior, and improving their leadership abilities," says Olson. Leaders were asked to seek out opportunities to positively reinforce, communicate, and use the coaching plans they developed. Since completing the coaching workshops, the approach in one port, for example Jacksonville, has been one of shaping the crews to a comfort level with using a behavioral process. A team began the effort to identify and encourage near-miss reporting, and for good reason, according to Olson. "We have always had a near-miss reporting process but we were only getting a couple of near misses reported every month, if that many, and they weren't really near misses. So it wasn't as effective as it could be. We figured out what we needed to change including educating people on what near misses were,

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why they were important and that they were, in fact, happening. We also had to make it easier to report them, and the big one—remove fear of repercussions or embarrassment,” he explains.

Surveys had shown that when it came to safety, the company had been somewhat reactionary when dealing with incidents and near misses. That realization inspired a change in the way managers are evaluated. Rather than evaluating managers on how many accidents did or didn’t occur—a lagging result—managers were expected to foster conditions where near-miss sharing is encouraged with metrics for same. Currently, near misses are recorded on a form that allows the reporter to rate on a numerical scale the potential severity of the consequence if the near miss occurred again.

Some might wonder why any organization would want the reporting rate of near misses to rise, but the causes of near misses are free learning opportunities and if addressed, the stuff of which serious safety incidents can be prevented. “If you aren’t getting a good amount of near misses, you should be worried. It means you have a blind spot,” Olson says. When an organization isn’t aware of the near misses that are happening, the underlying causes can never be addressed. Therefore, Moran’s management was thrilled to see the near-miss report rate rise from two to three a month to a current average of 150 to 180 per month. The next step was to study, develop, and design behavioral checklists to address the causes of near misses.

By beginning with the encouragement and reinforcement of reporting near misses, the organization learned that, as one manager said to Olson, they were “scratching itches they didn’t know they had.” For example, they learned that many of the repeat offenders when it came to near misses were not the

On the bright side, we have seen several near misses where these exact behaviors were stopped and corrected BEFORE an accident happened. We need each and every one of you to take ten seconds to assess the risk, to stop yourself, and stop your ship mates, from taking these kinds of unnecessary risks. Look at the near misses and actual incidents, learn from them and substitute the safe behaviors that minimize the probability of getting hurt. Along the way, make sure to promote the safe behaviors by your example and by providing positive reinforcement.

— Dave Olson, Behavior-Based Safety Manager, from *Near-Miss Sharing Report*, August 2013

The decision to utilize BBS grew out of the work of Moran’s Quality and Safety Steering Committee, which reviews all safety-related issues at the company. In 2010, the Committee conducted an extensively detailed study of safety data emanating from Moran and other companies within the maritime industry. The group analyzed the progress reflected in the data and reached a pivotal conclusion: although Moran had achieved major, historically significant improvements over the last several years, its top-down, compliance-based safety initiatives were now plateauing. This finding was not an affirmation of success; it was a call to action, Paul Tregurtha, Chairman/CEO, says. “If we’re not seeing continuous improvement, it means we need to do more.

— Excerpt from *Towline (The Magazine of Moran Towing Corporation)*, “Beyond Compliance: Moran Begins Developing a Behavior-Based Safety Program,” Vol. 64, March 2013



employees, but Moran's contractors. "Our managers at that port are now clarifying expectations with contractors about what we expect as far as how they get on and off the boats, for example," Olson states.

Another positive effect of the BBS process, though still in its initial stages, has been what Olson calls the closing of "perception gaps." "The near-miss reporting change helped close that gap by showing managers what we're dealing with out on the boats on a daily basis," he comments. "It has given a voice to the mariners that before, they didn't know they had and many, many unsafe conditions have been improved."

Olson advises patience and shaping employees into using the behavioral methods they've learned. That approach has proved successful so far and the company is now ready to move beyond near misses further up the causal chain to behaviors. The port of Jacksonville was chosen to pilot a BBS team and observation system. In October last year,

a team of representatives from each tug in Jacksonville underwent a BBS workshop with ADI's Don Nielsen and developed a behavior observation system. This was a high challenge since the tugboat industry doesn't fit the typical applications of BBS. Monthly and weekly meetings have allowed the safety team there to modify observation criteria, report any barriers to implementation, and pretty much serve as a BBS template for other ports. However, Olson expects the BBS process to be customized to each port's needs. "The observation process here isn't ideal yet, but they own it. They're managing it. Some of the comments I've heard are that we are really focusing on the positive; catching people doing things right," he states.

Observing people doing things right is already reflecting in a positive way since the group began observing specific, safe behaviors from checklists in mid-October. Within two months, safe behaviors rose from 70 percent to 90 percent and they have already begun to seek out other behaviors to improve. Olson, who spends a great deal of time on the tugboats, sees this as a great sign and he should know. A graduate of the Merchant Marine Academy and a former Coast Guard marine inspector, he understands the maritime industry from both offshore and shore side employment experience. That's probably why he takes any opportunity to talk with industry groups about how the behavioral process at Moran is helping and why he advises the following: "Whatever you do, talk to the guys on the boats or the frontline. Do a thorough assessment and be clear about what you are trying to change. Don't underestimate the role of leadership—even peer to peer. Be patient and don't try to change too much too fast; put the ideas out there; look for and reinforce them and they'll develop them. Just watch!"



[About the Author]

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Gail Snyder is a staff writer for Aubrey Daniels International. For the past 27 years, she has worked with clients to share their stories of the impact the science of behavior has had on their people and their business. In addition, Gail was the editor of Performance Management Magazine from 1987 to 2004.

[About ADI]

Regardless of your industry or expertise, one thing remains constant: People power your business. Since 1978 Aubrey Daniels International (ADI) has been dedicated to accelerating the business and safety performance of companies worldwide by using positive, practical approaches grounded in the science of behavior and engineered to ensure long-term sustainability. ADI provides clients with the tools and methodologies to help move people toward positive, results-driven accomplishments. Our clients accelerate strategy execution while fostering employee engagement and positive accountability at all levels of their organization.

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