



ACRISURE

RISK RESOURCES

SHORTCUTS AND YOUR SAFETY PROGRAM: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE CHALLENGER EXPLOSION

PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOR can make or break your safety results. One of the most dangerous safety dysfunctions is *normalization of deviance*. This is when individuals deviate from processes until the adopted way of practice becomes the new norm if it does not immediately cause a catastrophe or have a consequence. As a common example, an employee can get away with not wearing personal protective equipment, and nothing may happen—until that one tragic day.

The absence of adversity does not make a shortcut safe. Always ask: Are we good or are we lucky?

NO MATTER THE ENVIRONMENT, NORMALIZATION OF DEVIANCE DESTROYS SAFETY

NORMALIZATION OF DEVIANCE IN SPACE | Many of us remember the devastating explosion of The Challenger, the result of a catastrophic failure of O-rings – critical components used on the space shuttle. There were multiple instances of leaking O-rings in the 24 missions preceding Challenger, yet launches never were suspended. The thinking was that the O-Ring problem was not significant because there was never an adverse event. The deviation from best practices became the norm.



NORMALIZATION OF DEVIANCE AT WORK | Think of common shortcuts taken in your business. How can you prevent them?



Driving while using a cell phone



Ignoring “lock out-tag out” rules



Skipping pre- and post-shift briefings



Failing to wear personal protective equipment

Astronaut Mike Mullane is a safety expert and was a Mission Specialist in the first group of Space Shuttle Astronauts in 1978. He completed three space missions aboard the Shuttles *Discovery* and *Atlantis*. Mullane talks frequently about the Challenger explosion, referring to it as a “predictable surprise.” In his video, *Stopping Normalization of Deviance*, Mullane advises companies to employ these tools to stop normalization of deviance in its tracks:

- 1. Never allow shortcuts.** Budget and production pressures can force people to take a shortcut. The problem is that the shortcut may work and therefore team members will be tempted to take the shortcut repeatedly. Then the shortcut becomes the norm.
- 2. Deploy effective training.** On-going and new hire training are essential to ensuring best practices are upheld. Use a learning

management system to keep fresh safety content frequently in front of your employees.

- 3. Uphold Unconditional Respect for Process.** In a healthy safety culture, there is recognition that normalization of deviance is prevented by how we execute daily. Our handbooks and procedures only matter if we consistently enforce them.
- 4. Allow time-outs for employees to adapt to their environment.** Employees must understand that the situation determines the behavior. For example, the speed limit may be sixty-five mph on a highway, but does that mean we maintain that speed if driving into blinding rain or snow? Environments change. If we do not institutionally encourage time-outs, we are promoting the normalization of deviance, intentionally or not.

- 5. Build institutional knowledge.** When something goes wrong, get to the bottom of it – quickly. When performing root cause investigations, do not begin with the end in mind or with a preconceived notion as to the cause. Such a preconception may cause us to look in the wrong places. Remember we are always going after the truth, wherever it may lead us.
- 6. Keep Your Processes Fresh.** Take time to review what is working (best practices) and what is not working (worst practices). Recognize that the best ideas and ways of performing a task can become outdated. Regularly review and update your processes.

Driving normalization of deviance out of your organization is essential to creating a healthy safety culture. If not addressed, safety failures will undoubtedly occur.

Acrisure’s risk resources team offers on-demand, virtual and live training tools to help you elevate your organization’s performance and profitability and gain more control over the cost of your insurance and risk.

For more information, please contact your Acrisure representative or email riskresources@acrisure.com

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