

**Prospect****Leadership and Powering Improvement**

*“Over twenty years ago, I sat with a safety engineer, nursing a cup of tea, to review a site visit. **‘When we treat our staff as idiots, why is it a surprise when they act as idiots?’** he opined. Before I could comment on this rhetorical question, he added, **‘and what are we going to do to change it?’**”*

*The goal of ensuring that everybody goes home after a day’s work without suffering serious injury or harm to their health should not be controversial. The rest of this article attempts to answer the second question. By seeking out good practice that works for our organisations and emphasising the key role of leadership, by all safety champions, we can reduce accidents.*

*Powering Improvement (PI) has focussed our thoughts on how we take best practice, adapt it to our own organisations and deliver meaningful change. Without leadership, there is risk that PI would become a good idea that will evolve into real practice when we are not busy. Given the pressures on staff to maintain and build the networks, we are not busy as often as substations levitate. Thus leadership is a key theme of PI as without leadership the programme is like a network without power flowing through it, nice to look at but little practical use.*

*Success in reducing accidents requires all of us involved in safety to act as leaders by setting a tone, being an example and showing how much we care. In fact, everybody knows our approach to these three measures by our day-to-day behaviour. So if I were to juggle my mobile phone as I drive through your car park, it is reasonable to guess that you would not take my exhortations on road safety very seriously.*

*Given we persuade managers, safety professionals and safety reps to have a positive attitude to safety then we need to give colleagues some confidence and expertise to convert this enthusiasm into positive results. Also we need to ensure that our people understand what we want: my experience is that the individual who enthusiastically misreads your instructions is often far more dangerous than he who simply ignores it.*

*Human factors and behavioural safety had the potential to trip us all up: badly led, it could have become a game of passing blame to the unaware with the same speed that banks shuffled bad debts prior to the big crash of 2008. In Northern Powergrid, we set in place joint training of safety reps and managers, a couple fell into both categories. The success of the course could be judged by the insistence of those who missed it to be put on later courses as we learnt that behaviour is key to safety, that berating people rarely changes behaviour*

*and that we need to consider behaviour before changing process. By applying these lessons, the quality of safety leadership improved.*

*Similarly in Centrica, everybody involved in the power business including investment experts and contractors participated in the generation safe programme. This gave people the skills to appropriately challenge unsafe behaviour and to avoid designing processes that cause unsafe behaviour to spontaneously emerge. As with all successful initiatives the focus shifted as more people went through the course and it became clear that individuals wanted the skills to lead as much as understand the corporate safety message.*

*The key lessons across the sector remain that safety professionals and safety reps lead safety as well as managers. By visiting sites, demonstrating our commitment and listening then we can demonstrate leadership that makes a difference.*

*If we chose to treat colleagues as idiots, either deliberately or by omission, then we should expect to fail. We need to lead change and provide a compelling case for others to continue to change their behaviour when we have left the scene. By selecting initiatives that are relevant to our business, by demonstrating our commitment to the values that underpin those initiatives and by engaging everybody involved in the production process, then we will succeed in generating positive change. Napoleon defined a leader as **'a dealer in hope'** so what are we all doing this week to deliver that change."*