

Community Capacity Building as a Fleet Safety Tool

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At the peripheral of the driver training market is a segment that seeks safety programs not readily available from mainstream service providers. Aside from the standard features generally evident in such programs - audience relevance, technical expertise, quality support material and best practice accident avoidance advice - there is one element that they require as a priority - participant inclusiveness.

And there is evidence that the market segment is growing as fleet and safety managers seek to identify driver education and training programs that involve staff beyond previously accepted benchmarks.

Developing such programs is what I do and it relies on a methodology not normally associated with driver safety and training. The methodology is Community Capacity Building and its use represents a critical point of difference in the quest to maintain and sustain safe driver performance. The equation is a simple one: the higher the involvement, the greater the ownership, the more likelihood of compliance and or sustained change.

Community Capacity Building is in simple terms, interpersonal communication and relationship building at its best aimed at supporting individuals to identify and modify their risk taking behaviour as drivers.

I am not averse to advanced driving courses, simulators or off the shelf training courses. I just do not believe that in themselves they go far enough. To be effective they have to be part of a total package. The one size fits all type of training program may be cost effective but ultimately their value is compromised by the fact that they do not cater for the individual and the reality that is the shop floor environment.

The Learning Driver is a concept that encourages all drivers to accept and seek driver learning as a constant. In a business framework there are three important "communities" for the Learning Driver concept -

1. the individual;
2. the team (work unit) and
3. the organisation.

Critically, it is subtly distinct from Driver Education which is often touted as the best way to respond to the road toll. I do not agree that it (Driver Education) is the "must have" as some would suggest. Associated images of formalised road safety education leave me disappointed by the lack of understanding of the complexities associated with driver safety

improvement and by the wasted opportunity. The quick fix just does not exist in the world we drive in.

Such standards are aligned to management thinking that supports road safety messages featuring bold, black and white printing, authoritarian messages and personas. Stereotypical representations of the world today went out with black and white television!! Such standards and thinking are part of a suite I call Old Road Safety. Formal training and authoritarian benchmarking have a place in driver safety standards and education but are not the only answer.

New Road Safety

The Learning Driver is representative of a proactive learning environment that provides opportunity for genuine engagement and interaction with individuals.

This is Community Capacity Building by another word. This is what my vision of New Road Safety is about. Participants are encouraged to talk and discuss risk and safety issues of relevance and build their capacity, not just listen like stunned mullets. They have to be engaged and given necessary technical and interpretative information about driving and safety standards as part of a focused process of encouragement and action.

The New Road Safety and the Learning Driver concepts should be seen as the response to what the spirit and intention of the words "driver responsibility and ownership" mean. Quite correctly, government requires drivers to be more responsible and take greater responsibility for their actions behind the wheel. We all want increased driver ownership of safety standards. But what systems are there in place that help to achieve it in a coordinated and systematic way? Relying on the individual to make the necessary changes themselves isn't enough.

For many the commitment to avoid road trauma places a heavy reliance on on-road experience and, either consciously or unconsciously, good luck. The bottom line is that once the licence is in hand the individual is largely left alone to find their way through the safety maze.

New Road Safety is not about discarding the old. Its emphasis and urgency on inclusiveness as a valid education strategy has a place in the suite of support available today for road users. It represents a conscious thinking process. It is not a soft approach representing "leniency." The road rules of the land are there for a reason and are there to be enforced. Drivers have to comply with road rules and accept them as standards that require respect. To complain about a speeding fine is a waste of time in my book.

My approach recognises three elements - the 3 Cs - that are key delivery benchmarks for my New Road Safety approach to transport and industry safety. They are Communication, Capability and Commitment. Each has value and implications for the individual, team and organisation. Holistically, these

three levels link to provide the broadest possible context for positive driver safety interaction to occur.

Communication

Clearly there is a predominant focus on quality informal communication activities pitched at the individual employee. They are more credible if designed with the specific work environment in mind. So, depending on the audience, there is a place for example for toolbox sessions and tea room meetings as opposed to classroom lectures.

Capability

The identification of Capability levels and inherent potential for both having or avoiding a crash in each individual is an on-going process. Reflection and reassessment of individual driving strengths and weaknesses in participants is the aim. Assisting the process is a series of standards that provide a benchmark, a minimum standard of performance expectation. Critically, ownership of the benchmark, validation and justification for it must include all three organisational levels. If it does not, the credibility of the process can be compromised.

Commitment

Commitment begins with the individual becoming aware they are part of a road safety process quite different from the expectation they may have initially held. Trust then becomes a key issue as well as the issue of incentive. Goodwill in itself is not enough. If there is a problem safety issue amongst individuals or across a workforce there has to be some resolve to minimise or eradicate it.

Management commitment is a significant determinant in long term driver safety standards. The process of change can be started by an outside consultant but momentum must continue after the outsider has left. The answer lies in organisational culture and structure. Driver safety improvement is not about “quick fixes” but long term commitment. There is no “one size fits all” approach. The training programs I have described and the 3 Cs elements within them are not “off the shelf” productions. Allowance must be made for individual environment factors as no two worksites or two workforces are identical. To maximize effect, the consultant has to adapt and deliver to the client needs and not vice versa.

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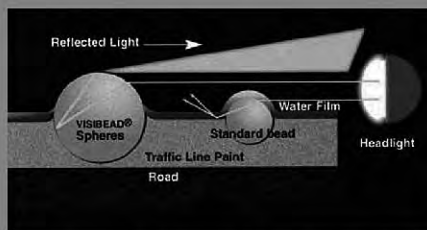


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