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Culture Change



"Culture does not change because we desire to change it. Culture changes when the organization is transformed; the culture reflects the realities of people working together every day."
—Frances Hesselbein

While attending the recent Safety Institute of Australia (SIA) conference in Melbourne, I attended a session on culture change. The speaker described culture as what really happens in an environment—not what you would like or think, but what is actually happening. This description applies to all of us wherever we might be—not only in the workplace but also at home, while attending personal and professional events, while driving, etc.

Changing culture is a significant endeavor. To start, we must recognize the existing culture, determine the desired culture, then plan how to make the needed changes. In my messages to you over the past year, I have suggested changes needed in the culture that we often encounter as ASSE volunteers and members. The challenge is getting those involved to recognize the need for change, then implementing solutions to move us forward in a positive manner.

At the beginning of the 2008-09 Society year, ASSE's Executive Committee determined that along with our normal operations we would focus on chapter affairs, virtual services, strategic planning and global opportunities. The objective was to promote culture change that would improve these elements and move them forward in a positive manner for ASSE. I'd like to share with you some highlights of our progress.

In chapter affairs, we are implementing a more efficient method of training chapter officers. Specific materials are being developed for each officer position and this information will be made available online. As a result, the materials will be uniform; officers will be able to access them at any time; and the Society will be able to better track involvement. This year will also mark the first time one of our international chapters will receive a chapter of the year award. The number of chapters earning Chapter Star status has also increased. This means more chapters than ever are delivering superior service by providing quality programs that support their members and advance the Society's mission and vision, while having a positive impact on their community.

In the area of virtual services, our progress is highlighted by the Society's first-ever virtual symposium, which was held this past April. This week-long event featured expert presenters from around the world, and offered an excellent mix of topics and ideas. Attendees from all around the globe participated in live sessions, networked with presenters and interacted with other attendees. They also had on-demand access to recorded sessions, helping them make the most of their valuable learning time. The feedback to date has been very positive.

In terms of strategic planning, our process has been strengthened. We held a full-day strategic planning meeting at the winter board meeting, and working in conjunction with the Congress of Councils will ensure that ASSE is moving forward on activities to improve the profession and the Society.

Much like they are everywhere, ASSE's global opportunities continue to expand as well. We recently assigned international chapters to existing regions to help these chapters become more connected and involved. Key ASSE leaders represented the Society in Korea (18th World Congress on Safety & Health at Work), Canada (Canadian Society of Safety Engineering conference), China (4th International Forum on Work Safety), the U.K. (Institution of Occupational Safety and Health conference), Australia (SIA conference) and Kuwait (Kuwait Chapter's 5th annual conference). In addition, current senior vice president Darryl C. Hill, CSP, has started an online global community to help SH&E professionals around the world communicate and network.

I have enjoyed my year as president, meeting many members and SH&E professionals around the globe. During these interactions, it has become clear that we all face very similar challenges. Be assured that ASSE continues to seek solutions to help you answer these challenges and to advance the profession. As ASSE continues to move forward, our culture will continue to change. Thank you all for the opportunity you gave me to influence this ongoing change as your leader this past year.

Warren K. Brown, CSP, ARM, CSHM

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