

Building a Bridge for Safety Leaders

When it comes to understanding the importance of building construction safety, Andrew Gaudes, Dean of the Paul J. Hill School and the Kenneth Levene School of Business at the University of Regina (UofR), has a panoramic view.

"Safety is one of the paramount areas of infrastructure and the management of buildings. It's not only about the people inside it, but the people around it, that visit it, that may be in adjacent spaces, as well as the ongoing health of those inside the spaces associated with the building environment," said Gaudes.

Prior to starting his role as Dean four years ago, Gaudes worked in the area of architecture and interior design, specializing in facility and physical asset management. He also taught courses in organization studies and entrepreneurship at both the undergraduate and graduate level prior to obtaining his doctorate in Management. Through his academic and professional career, Gaudes has been heavily exposed to safety practices and protocol, which continues in his current role as Dean.

"Workplace health and safety becomes a part of what you live and being conscious of it for your own employees, staff, faculty, and students who are occupying those spaces."

SCSA President, Collin Pullar, recently met with Gaudes to discuss the new Master of Business Administration (MBA) in Public Safety Management offered exclusively in Saskatchewan by the Kenneth Levene Graduate School of Business — the first of its kind in North America.

The MBA in Public Safety Management was developed with insight from leaders in a wide spectrum of industries to teach core business functions and strategic techniques for achieving focused business goals in complex markets, among other business fundamentals related to strategic leadership of public safety.



Left to right: Collin Pullar, SCSA President; Andrew Gaudes, Dean of the Hill and Levene Schools of Business at the University of Regina

The program actively targets public safety organizations and companies that have large infrastructure and an abundance of physical assets. The program also consists of an international study tour to expose students to safety management systems in other countries.

When it comes to the application of the knowledge gained in the program, Gaudes stresses how unaware the public is of the multitude of safety concerns that surround us on a daily basis.

"We wake up in the morning, we pour that milk into our cereal, we trust the milk is free from any viruses or bacteria ... We trust that when we get in the car, that the brakes are going to run ... We trust that when we cross that bridge, all the members of that bridge have been checked as it's supposed to be and it won't collapse ... We spend the whole day trusting without realizing it," said Gaudes.

"A program like this allows for that trust to be valid. It allows people to understand that there are people who are developing these products, producing these products, shipping these products, managing facilities and assets, with our best interests at heart. We are creating more and more skilled managers at the most senior level who have not only the business sense in understanding being a manager and a leader, but are also mindful of the physical environments that people live in and around," he added.

Pullar believes the program is well-suited for construction industry professionals in Saskatchewan who are currently managers, supervisors, executives, or on a trajectory toward that type of leadership role in a company. He also sees a lot of potential opportunities for the SCSA to get involved with the Levene School MBA program to shed light on construction-specific safety issues in Saskatchewan.

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"We have a very diverse board of directors who work for, or own, companies in the residential, commercial, and industrial construction sectors who could greatly benefit from a program like this. Understanding the safety strategies and solutions presented in other industries is a chance to build and improve on our own practices in the construction industry. These industry professionals also have years of experiences and access to data that could really benefit other students in the program as well."

Gaudes agrees that there would be several ways the SCSA could contribute to the program, whether it be providing students with ideas and access to subject matter experts for capstone research projects, to working with faculty to develop curriculum, as well as conducting class presentations.

Aside from meeting with Gaudes regarding the Levene MBA in Public Safety Management, the SCSA has had several other opportunities to speak with business groups and industry-related associations about the issue of workplace safety. According to the 2015 Workers' Compensation Board's Annual Report, Saskatchewan has the fourth highest injury rate in Canada.

"In talking with everyone from government procurement specialists, financial investors, company owners, and trade associations, we recognize that we have a safety issue in Saskatchewan. But the bigger problem is actually a leadership issue in Saskatchewan – and that, as leaders, involves recognizing what our responsibilities are to the people who serve us, and in turn, we serve as well," said Pullar.

"We discuss, at great lengths, the implementation of a vision of how we can construct a product more safely and more efficiently right from the design phase and to be able to find opportunities to deliver that product with fewer risks attached to it; perhaps within shorter timelines. We're looking to build efficiencies that will allow employees to have those tools in place," added Pullar.

From working and overseeing numerous building construction projects, Gaudes agrees that safety is an ongoing issue on work sites — especially among new and young workers — which can be remedied with strong communication from leadership.

"I always think kids are most vulnerable — in their minds, they're immortal, they can withstand almost anything — so it takes the

responsibility and stewardship in management and leadership of the people who work around them to ensure that they are mindful of how they need to work," said Gaudes.

"We're fortunate today in that there's a lot more legislation and more comfortable equipment to work in to improve safety practices, but at the end of the day, being told how to do something isn't enough. There has to be some sort of explanation

as to why things are done a certain way ... it's not because we'd like to make life more difficult, we're trying to put workers in an environment where they do have a prolonged life and safe workplace," he added.

According to Gaudes, part of explaining to workers the 'why' of safety has much to do with modeling the behaviour expected of workers.

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Andrew Gaudes

"If I walk onto a shop floor not wearing a hardhat, but I require all my employees to wear a hardhat when they're on the floor, then that sends a message that it's not that important."

Aside from leading by example, Gaudes claims that having empathy for your workers is also a large part of being an effective leader.

"If you've got the skillset to be at a particular worksite, you should be feeling just as prepared to go into that site as any other worker,

and there has to be an appreciation for individuals who work with you. Leadership is not by force — you have to be a person who is of influence in a positive way and workers want to be around you, and will take your advice, comments, and direction," said Gaudes.

Pullar recently joined the Hill and Levene Schools Leaders Council to offer his expertise in the area of construction safety to collaborate with other

business leaders in order to advance business education at the University of Regina, and among industry professionals working in Saskatchewan.

"The SCSA offers nationally-recognized safety training, including the Certificate of Recognition (COR®) and National Construction Safety Officer (NCSO) programs, which teach safety leaders how to develop and maintain safety management systems. Bridging the knowledge and training from our programs to the Levene MBA in Public Safety Management program is a distinct path we want to pave to develop stronger and more effective safety leaders in our province," said Pullar.

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Collin Pullar