

THE STRATEGIC CASE FOR SAFETY



By Collin Pullar, President, Saskatchewan Construction Safety Association

Often times when we hear about safety in our industry, it comes across in a way that sounds negative, expensive and regulatory; like a set of rules to be sure that we are compliant with some form of onerous legislation that gets in the way of productivity. The increase in penalties for being “caught” sets up a sort of adversarial relationship with Occupational Health and Safety officials. A cat and mouse culture then results where the objective is more about how to avoid getting caught rather than just doing things safely.

Well, in our rapidly growing industry in Saskatchewan, more and more

businesses are seeing the merits of a safety management system like SCSA’s National Certificate of Recognition (COR™) and developing a safety culture as a direct contributor to the bottom line of their companies. Many have moved from viewing investment in safety management as simply an act of compliance, to actually beginning to see safety as a potential competitive advantage. What? Really?!

I know, it sounds counterintuitive. Besides, a business has to put financial and human resources into this kind of stuff. A business owner might think, “We are running businesses here,

and I have to see a return on this kind of investment. So, from a business management perspective, what’s the real gain in doing this?” While I could easily talk about the obvious things I have heard others talk about, such as the impact on WCB rates, that is not what’s interesting. One does not have to be a genius to figure that if people are not getting injured and/or the injuries that do occur are less severe, it’s going to save a few dollars.

If you were to take a good look and talk with many of the businesses that have taken their safety management systems seriously, you will notice that they also seem to perform financially, very well over the long term. They view safety management as one of several strategic risk management tools that contribute to more efficiently operating profitably while protecting the financial, material, and human assets they leverage to create that profitability (with lower lost time due to injury, loss of productivity or cost of claims). From a purely business management perspective, one can argue that business leaders that view safety as part of their risk management strategy likely also pay attention to other elements within their human resources that achieve long-term performance goals. Many of SCSA’s COR-certified companies and their employees not only embrace

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a safety culture, they are proud of it too. These companies seem to keep their better employees longer, and we all know good employees contribute towards the reputation and goodwill of a business. This includes the ability to attract and retain hard-to-get talent. This is the kind of reputation that is impossible to buy! In a market where skilled labour is tight and hard to find, companies that can keep really good and healthy productive human assets, naturally have a competitive edge over those that do not.

So, does this mean that investing in achieving COR certification through the SCSA means that your company will automatically become more profitable? Well, to help put it into context, this is not unlike investing in developing strong bookkeeping, project management, and having good legal support for a business. These also require financial investment, and by themselves may not guarantee the success of a business, but if leveraged well, can contribute to strong, long-term profitability.

Collin Pullar is the president of the Saskatchewan Construction Safety Association, an industry-funded enterprise with nearly 9,000 member companies in Saskatchewan. Its mission is to provide high-quality safety training and advice to construction employers and employees that will lead to reduced human and financial losses associated with injuries. Pullar has a master's certificate in public management, a master's in business administration, and is a certified human resource professional candidate.

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