

Taking care of PEOPLE

Former FirstGroup safety executive Gary Catapano, now chief strategy and safety advisor at transportation product developer Magtec, (pictured above, at left) says: "Some of us worked together in FirstGroup for a long time. It is a very large company engaged in transporting people safely. We learned a lot of lessons along the way in terms of how to change behaviour and how to get people to do the right thing."

"One of the lessons we learned early on was that culture was at the very heart of why people do what they do in a safe organisation. Culture is so very important because in the absence of a good safety culture, people will be harmed, lives will be lost, property will be damaged, and really there is a moral obligation and a good citizenship obligation for any corporation ... to ensure safety of operations for their own employees as well as anyone who could be impacted by the operation."

Corporate leadership plays a key role, he points out. "What we have learned over the years is that safety is driven culturally by leadership." Catapano refers to a theoretical safety progression in which safety practices become ever more embedded in management (pictured right). He also quotes Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor emeritus Edgar Schein, who said: 'The only thing of real importance that leaders do is create and manage culture.' Adds Catapano: "And every good leader that I've had the

Sir Moir Lockhead, former patron of the SOE and co-founder of FirstGroup, chaired an expert panel discussion about safety of operations on Thursday 26 May, which took in presentations from some of his ex-colleagues. Will Dalrymple was there

COMMENT FROM THE AUDIENCE

"I was only in my early 30s and had been out to an accident. Not our fault; the car had driven across the front of our truck; we had hit it on the passenger side, and killed the passenger after shunting the car on to a garage forecourt. We didn't brake; we didn't have time to brake. And I went to the other car, which was just back from Manchester airport, with suitcases in the back, a child seat in the rear and a little notice: 'Thank you mummy and daddy for a lovely holiday'. That stuck with me. I saw then how one action can mean the difference between life and death. And I thought, we are never going to kill someone again."

opportunity to work with over the years recognised that this was their obligation."

In acknowledging that responsibility, Sir Moir (pictured above, second from right) states that a fatal incident involving a staff member has a huge effect on everyone in a business. "You can't live through that and not change. Your life changes." He recalled the incident of a

mechanic who was killed recovering a bus. "At his funeral, his wee daughter said to me, 'what do we do now?' That changes everything."

Such trauma might have driven his uncompromising stance toward organisational safety. He recalled the company's reaction to the Ladbroke Grove rail crash (1999 – First Group was not blamed). Sir Moir said: "When we did the assessment, our engineer said to me, 'Everything's fine, however the rear car didn't have the safety device – it was disconnected, though that had nothing to do with the crash.'" It turned out that perhaps 60% of trains were operating in such a manner. Sir Moir recalls: "I said, 'Okay guys, when will it be 100? Give me a timeline, because if you don't, 40% of the fleet is going to run tomorrow, and 60% is going to be laid up. Because I'm not running trains that are not safe.' How could you sleep at night?" He adds that within nine months the ATP (automatic train protection) worked on 100% of the Great Western trains' power cars. He concludes: "What it's about is setting standards that are tough, challenging. If I'd said, 60% would be fine, we would have gotten to 60% but not to 70%."

One of the key staff involved with implementing safety is former colleague Naveed Qamar (pictured above, at





right), a safety and environmental leader with more than 35 years' experience.

He says: "I spent a number of years at FirstGroup developing injury prevention. Gary called Sir Moir the father of injury prevention – so I guess I was the mother, because it was down to me to get everybody together and work on something that was quite unique at that time for FirstGroup, from scratch, and implemented and embedded quickly. We had some incidents while we were implementing this, but the focus was on consolidating and embedding injury prevention to the extent that everyone owned it."

He continues: "Injury prevention was moving on from just talking about compliance and fixing issues as they arose to a more proactive approach, and winning hearts and minds. We had a bus business where we had drivers on the road away from supervision for long periods of time each shift. These were captains of their vehicles, in charge of that bus with 70 or 80 people, and we had to empower them to do mental risk assessments as they went along and make the right choices and take the right decisions and stop work – and not just that, but refuse work if their supervisor gave them something to do that they believed was unsafe."

Adds Catapano: "We created an injury prevention programme and handbook that empowered employees



with a simple motto: "If you cannot do it safely, don't do it."

Qamar continues:

"That injury prevention handbook was our platform for engaging with staff on a regular basis; it could be on any topic. We asked them if they had any concerns about safety.

We recorded employee concerns, and reported on them; soon there were many thousands, and Sir Moir wanted to know what was happening with each and every one that had some sort of action to be taken. Senior management teams would also go out and check the effective implementation of them. People were held accountable for not resolving issues. It's very important that if you create a near-miss reporting system, workers can see that something is being done about it. Otherwise they will stop reporting and stop caring."

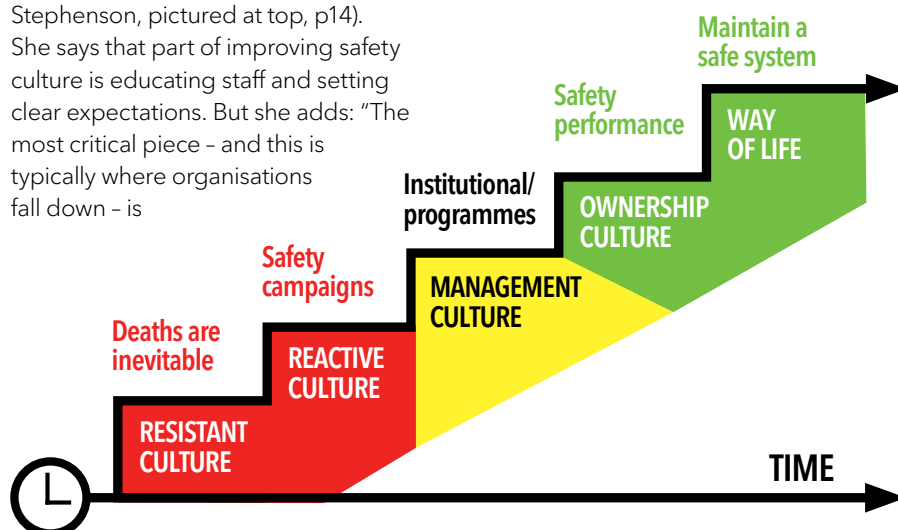
That point was reinforced by an expert on human behaviour in the workplace, Dr Judy Agnew, pictured above, second from left, author of four books on the subject and 2021 recipient of the Sir Moir Lockhead Safety Award (which she officially received at the event from SOE president-elect Shaun Stephenson, pictured at top, p14). She says that part of improving safety culture is educating staff and setting clear expectations. But she adds: "The most critical piece – and this is typically where organisations fall down – is

AUDIENCE Q&A

Q: "I was a safety officer for a blue chip brewery, and over about a year we did a lot of training on a continual basis to develop a safety culture. Within that, or slightly after, we had a serious incident in a workshop environment that involved senior managers. How do you address that?"

A: "There is a natural variance in events that occur, and sometimes the work that you're doing doesn't always take immediate effect. What this journey of creating a safety culture is all about is doing the right thing consistently over time. Everybody has to be on board with that in terms of the way that you align the organisational consequences. We had a chairman, Martin Gilbert, and he said that sometimes you had to remove people from the organisation if they refuse to work safely, and didn't want to be a part of what needs to be done. Better to let them go than have them be injured, or even worse, at work."

-Gary Catapano



establishing effective consequences. What we know from science of behaviour is that people will do what they do based on the consequences they experience. Someone can go through training and learn about what they are supposed to do to build a safety culture. But what happens to them when they do those things? What happens when they don't do them? Consequences that support desired safety culture behaviours are essential in building and sustaining a safety culture. And the most important consequence is positive reinforcement."

To explain, she contrasts two approaches to safety management: the safety 'cop' and the safety coach. "The cop is looking for things that are wrong and reacts with negative consequences. It is essentially exception management and tends to be the default approach for most leaders. The problem with this approach is that overuse of negative consequences actually prevents organisations from getting to the highest levels of safety – because it stifles engagement. People become fearful and just keep their head down and do only what they have to.

"If the balance of consequences people experience around safety heavily favours positive versus negative, then you get people that feel valued,

COMMENT FROM THE AUDIENCE

"The majority of operator licences are for small businesses, and it's getting the message out to them. Maintaining a level of performance is an issue that we see all the time when people think they are compliant. What they actually see are the peaks and troughs of compliance. When people are preparing for a compliance audit and need to get all the staff in, to review everything and make sure it's right, they're not actually compliant; they are non-compliant. They get through the audit and then they are compliant. But for us, that's not a culture of compliance. The Earned Recognition scheme focuses not on being compliant but having a culture of continuous performance."

trusted and respected, and that leads to people who talk openly about safety challenges; who contribute to near-miss reporting, and who work on hazards when they see them." She advises a 4:1 ratio of positive to negative feedback.

Agnew says that one of the reasons leaders don't use more positive

reinforcement is based on the way we hold leaders accountable for safety. If the only metric is incident rate, then it's easy for a leader who has not had any recent incidents in their area to put safety on the back burner. Such metrics lead to reactive safety management that can end in disaster. She adds: "On the day of the Deepwater Horizon explosion (2010) they were celebrating seven years without a lost time accident. By that metric they were doing great. Instead, we need to hold leaders accountable for behaviour: what are they doing about prevention? Does staff engage with all the behaviours that will prevent incidents, not just reacting when incidents occur? We need to start to look at leading indicators: identifying preventative behaviours at all levels, and then measuring whether those behaviours are happening. That allows us to build in consequences for their behaviour. The way we measure safety is foundational to making a shift to better safety culture today." [TE](#)



THE POWER OF POSITIVITY

Dr Judy Agnew said that the best culture of safety fosters 'discretionary' (optional) behaviour among workers, and the ideal way to do that is via positive, not negative, reinforcement; praise, not criticism. Adds Naveed Qamar: "If you are in a compliance culture, you are only doing just enough. There's a risk you will drop below that, because people are prone to making mistakes if they are tired or stressed. We wanted to move to a proactive culture, planning, risk assessment, and people having knowledge and understanding of their work to do it safely. Because you are above the regulatory compliance baseline, you can move away from that fear of regulatory action. What you really want is for people to understand and care about their wellbeing and safety to the extent that it's just the way we do things."

THE DISCRETIONARY EFFORT MODEL

