

The CORESafety® Interview with Don Ritz

CORESafety® is the National Mining Association's (NMA) common safety and health framework that relies on a management system approach to improve safety and health performance at mining operations. The goal of CORESafety is to achieve zero fatalities and a 50 percent reduction in the rate of injuries in U.S. mining within five years – 0:50:5.

CORESAFETY

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Donald D. (Don) Ritz is an independent consultant and a John Maxwell Certified Coach and Speaker who specializes in safety and leadership, particularly as they relate to mining companies. Until mid 2013, Don was with Barrick Gold Corporation as Senior Vice President, Safety and Leadership, and was a member of the Senior Leaders Team. An acknowledged expert in corporate loss mitigation and risk management through the creation and implementation of environment, safety and health policies and programs, he developed Courageous Leadership for Safety and Health, and guided the launch of a Barrick leadership program that resulted in a 70% improvement there in two years. In 2009, Don was awarded the International Society of Mine Safety Professionals (ISMSP) esteemed Leadership Award, followed by the Mining Industry Roundtable Health and Safety Recognition Award in 2010.

In a recent interview with CORESafety's "Dig a Little Deeper" series, he shared his thoughts on the impact that leadership can have on safety and mining, his belief that it's absolutely possible for mining companies to have "zero" accidents, what he considers to be the secrets to achieving world-class safety success and how CORESafety is driving change in the industry.

Question: CORESafety emphasizes the importance of leadership when striving to improve safety and health performance in mining companies. Tell us how you first became so passionate about safety and leadership in the work environment. Was there a certain event or moment that caused you to decide to dedicate your professional life to this?

Ritz: I had spent a good portion of my career in operations. I always knew that safety was important, but never really connected my personal behavior to what went on at the jobsites. Then, two things happened that changed my attitude – a couple of fellows that worked for me got burned – fairly seriously. It was a wakeup call for me. I could rationalize why things happened, but I really came to the conclusion that I was responsible for their safety, and for the safety of anyone who worked for me. That realization was fairly significant for me.

Then, there was a CEO that I worked for who wanted to know how much certain losses were costing the organization, and I was tasked to figure this out. It was quite astounding when you sat down and calculated the costs – people, medical, lost time. As a result, our organization changed a lot of things to minimize those losses. In my own operations department, we (like every other department) were on a 26 element loss management program that was heavy on auditing. My operations management team took those and divvied them up. We studied them in-depth and taught them to our organization. As we took on the ownership of that, rather than leaving it to others, we began to realize the impact that behavior can have on losses – and on everything, really. And it starts at the top – with the CEO and other executives.

Question: Do you find that most miners pay attention to what the CEO and other executives think about safety?

Ritz: Most definitely. It's a matter of "what is interesting to my boss is fascinating to me." But when it comes to safety, too many people pay lip service to it and then just hand it off to someone else. I came to the realization that safety was a line management responsibility. Whether you're a CEO, a superintendent, a supervisor or a manager – the fact is that when you take ownership of safety yourself, it changes what happens to the organization and your own behaviors. If the miners see you (a leader) taking it seriously, then they're going to take it seriously too. Several years back, there was a Denzel Washington movie called "Remember the Titans" and there was a great quote in there – "attitude reflects leadership." I'm convinced today more than ever that our organizations are a direct reflection of our leadership.



Question: It's true that consistent, strong and positive leadership is what CORESafety refers to as a "safety performance accelerator." But can you teach someone how to behave "passionately" about something like safety?

Ritz: Our behaviors come out of our belief systems. People don't find real passion until something happens that affects them directly. It's when you go through some type of an emotional experience that your passion begins to pick up. For example, we don't tend to think about the emotional disconnect that happens between employees and the companies they work for, whenever there's an incident involving safety. There's a human impact that occurs.

Question: At Barrick Gold Corporation, you developed "Courageous Leadership for Safety and Health." How did you get that program started?

Ritz: I started at Barrick in 2003. At my previous employer, I was responsible for loss management, risk management, insurance, etc. We'd done a number of things there that were the forerunners of what became "Courageous Leadership." I only formally went into the safety field in 1995. I didn't look at safety from a systems perspective – I looked at it from a leadership perspective. We needed the fundamentals of a safety system, but if you don't have leadership commitment, there's not a safety system around that will work.

At Barrick, we wound up getting executives across the globe to teach the safety program. We rolled it out so the line people were doing some of the teaching, as well as the direct reports, general managers, the chief operating officers, etc. When you get people standing up there and teaching it, then people know it's important. When I work with a company today, I teach them how to teach.

Question: In recent years, we've seen mining companies making some measurable improvements in safety as they've implemented initiatives like CORESafety and other programs. You said there was one company in particular that really made you sit up and notice the importance of being committed to safety?

Ritz: This actually goes back to 1996 when I used to believe that some "accidents" are inevitable, and it was impossible to go more than one or two million hours without a safety incident. I attended a Business Roundtable and there was a company that received a safety award for going 17 million hours without a lost-time incident, if you can believe that. I visited with their head of safety and their entire executive team – 7 people – and we spent six hours talking about nothing but safety. Equally amazing was that their incident investigation team was comprised of their executive team. These folks were seriously committed to safety. Their actions spoke louder than any words. I began to see that you really could set a goal of zero incidents, and achieve it.

It all boils down to this – commitment to safety at both the management and executive level is critical.

Question: We certainly agree with that. CORESafety even includes seven leadership expectations and a number of competencies that management should exhibit when possible, all strongly associated with safety performance.

Ritz: Yes, and CORESafety has all the elements you need to have – leadership, focus, commitment, everything. The first module in CORESafety is Leadership Development. Like "Courageous Leadership" it recognizes that safety starts at the top, and without that commitment it's unlikely that safety improvement will incur. Leadership and culture define a company's philosophy and commitment, and CORESafety provides the tools to help companies enhance these attributes in their organizations. At Barrick, we saw a 70% improvement in two years. I knew one CEO who changed the safety and risk culture in less than a minute when he simply said, "Don't ever walk in here asking for money for any changes, unless you've already done a risk assessment first." You can change behaviors and culture, if you have the commitment.

Question: So you really believe it's possible to get to ZERO accidents?

Ritz: I absolutely do believe it. Whether you get "all the way there" or not is another question. If you believe it won't happen, then it won't. Whatever you believe is what will happen. Your own beliefs are what will drive your behaviors. But you have to have personal involvement in safety on the part of your executives to even try to achieve it. Miners need to see that their leaders are out and about, walking around, talking to them about their lives, their work, and reinforcing the idea that they visibly care about safety.

Question: What is “Visible Felt Leadership”?

Ritz: I coined that term to explain that leaders need to be 1) **Visible** – they have to be seen by their employees, 2) **Felt** – they have to be close enough to workers to be impacted by the presence of that leader, and 3) **Leadership** – they need to show concern, but also be interacting and providing stimulus about them or the company.

Visible Felt Leadership (VSL) is having the tenacity, commitment, courage and passion to frequently connect with each other in the workplace. As a leader, you need to guard against complacency. Get out in the field where you can see, touch and experience the safety elements. It takes getting in touch with the people to understand what’s really going on in an organization.

Try setting some targets to keep managers, superintendents and supervisors out in the field, rather than office-bound. For example, I’ve recommended that first line supervisors should be out and interacting 80% of their time. Superintendents might try 30%. But the key is *interacting*, not just walking around. Get your miners to understand that you care by demonstrating it through your own behaviors.

To change your culture, you need to set the example and get people to pay attention to what you’re doing *by doing it*. So often we tell people that we want their behavior to be consistent, but we never tell them or show them what the behaviors are. It’s up to our leaders to do that.

Question: What’s the secret to achieving world-class safety success within mining companies?

Ritz: I think it’s all about these three things – your belief system, risk management and leadership. Interestingly, these are all embedded in the **CORE** Safety management system. These are the components that lead to world-class safety.

It’s about getting senior leaders to take personal responsibility for safety and taking the time to get out regularly in the field, so the whole organization can see them. Then it’s about making a big deal about each incremental improvement and celebrating successes when they’re achieved.

I’ll say it again – it absolutely is possible to get to zero accidents. If you *create* the right culture, it will define the behavior of everyone in your mining company. And it all starts with executives leading the way.

Closing: Don, thank you very much for taking the time to share your safety philosophies with NMA members.

Ritz: You’re quite welcome and I wish the best for everyone with their safety initiatives.

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