

What High-Performing Manufacturing Leaders Do Differently About Safety

written by Lauri Moon | August 13, 2026



As OSHA's Safe & Sound Week continues, manufacturers are encouraged to recognize the critical role leadership plays in building and sustaining effective safety and health programs. OSHA identifies management leadership as a cornerstone of successful workplace safety efforts, helping organizations proactively identify hazards, engage employees, and create safer work environments.

While policies, procedures, and training are essential, the strongest safety cultures don't begin with a checklist. They begin with leadership. The most successful manufacturing leaders understand that safety is not a department or a program. It's a shared organizational value that influences every decision, every process, and every employee.

The difference between an average safety program and an exceptional one often comes down to how leaders approach safety.

Looking Beyond Lagging Indicators

Many organizations measure safety performance using lagging indicators such as recordable incidents, lost-time injuries, or workers' compensation claims. While these metrics are important, they only tell part of the story.

High-performing leaders also focus on leading indicators, which help predict and prevent future incidents. These may include:

- Safety observations
- Near-miss reporting
- Employee participation in safety activities
- Training completion rates
- Hazard identification and corrective actions

Leading indicators provide insight into the health of a safety culture before an incident occurs. Instead of simply measuring what went wrong, organizations can track the actions that help keep employees safe.

Visible Leadership Involvement Matters

Employees pay close attention to leadership behavior.

When leaders regularly discuss safety, participate in facility walkthroughs, attend safety meetings, and engage employees in conversations about workplace hazards, they demonstrate that safety is a business priority.

Visible involvement sends a powerful message that safety is not just a requirement, but an expectation shared throughout the organization.

The strongest safety cultures are built when employees see leaders actively supporting and reinforcing safe work practices.

Creating Safety Ownership at Every Level

Effective leaders understand they cannot build a strong safety culture alone.

Safety ownership should extend throughout the organization, from executives and

supervisors to frontline employees. Every individual should understand their role in identifying risks, reporting concerns, and contributing to a safer workplace.

When employees feel empowered to speak up and participate in safety initiatives, organizations benefit from greater engagement, stronger communication, and improved hazard awareness.

Safety becomes something employees do with leadership, not something leadership does to employees.

Building a Culture of Accountability

Accountability is often misunderstood as discipline or enforcement.

In reality, a culture of accountability is built on clear expectations, consistent communication, training, and follow-through. Employees should understand not only what is expected of them, but also why those expectations matter.

Strong leaders recognize and reward positive safety behaviors while addressing gaps constructively and consistently.

When accountability exists at every level of the organization, safety becomes embedded in daily operations rather than treated as a standalone initiative.

Leadership Sets the Tone

The most successful manufacturers recognize that safety performance reflects organizational leadership.

When leaders actively support safety, employees are more engaged, communication improves, and safety becomes part of the company's culture rather than simply a compliance obligation. The result is a safer, stronger, and more resilient organization.

At IMC, we help manufacturers develop leaders who can drive continuous improvement, strengthen workforce engagement, and foster cultures where safety is everyone's responsibility. Let's Create a Winning Safety Culture | IMC together!

As Safe & Sound Week reminds us, safety is not just about preventing incidents. It's about creating an environment where leadership, accountability, and employee involvement work together to support long-term success.