

Raising the Bar! – University Partnerships Programme Strikes Gold Again in Health & Safety Innovation

Last month Steve Bernard caught up with Mike Eady – Executive Director of Safety, Health & Environment to talk to him about the programme's 2nd RoSPA Gold Award in back to back years.

Mike Eady – ME
Steve Bernard - SB

SB: Congratulations on your RoSpa Gold. How does it feel to be receiving Gold status for the 2nd year running? ME: It feels very satisfying to receive. Its recognition for the hard work of all those involved at UPP have put in. More importantly, its recognition of the fact that UPP people are less likely to get hurt in the course of their work.

SB: What's the significance of the award's scheme to your business in real terms? ME: The award shows the outside world that UPP takes its responsibility for health and safety very seriously. It demonstrates we are up there with the very best.

SB: What's been the secret of your team's success? ME: Innovation in a word Steve. We have taken a long hard look at how to keep people safe and well, changed the rules a little, learned from other disciplines (Lean, Psychology, Marketing to name just 3). Then we decided to focus on behaviour; behaviour of the organisation as well as the behaviour of people working with us, colleagues and students alike.

SB: So where are you exactly on the journey – what's next to do? ME: I like to break all transformational journeys into three phases, 1) Fix, 2) Focus & 3) Grow. Fix simply means identifying the crucial failings that need immediate action. We have completed that phase. Focus is where we focus on the 3 – 4 areas that need longer term attention. We are nearing the end of that phase. Grow is where the organisation learns and starts to develop interdependence amongst its people. There is no end to the grow phase, we are just commencing that final but infinite phase.

SB: OK, so what were the 3 – 4 longer terms areas of focused attention you chose? ME: After much consider we chose:

1. Building a H&S Management System. This gives us the ability to quickly reference essential documents. The previous system not intuitive and got in the way.
2. Creation of an Employee Health Agenda with x3 distinct areas:
 - a. Mental Health
 - b. Physical Health; including professional medical advice
 - c. Workplace. Sustaining a healthier working environment.
3. A radical look at how we train People
 - a. We want to provide them with a genuine ability to learn
 - b. We are starting to take more of a coaching style of learning
 - c. We are using Six Sigma tools that build on the Kaizen methodology



4. Going for the ISO 45001 accreditation for the safety management system. This will allow us to really understand the course of incidences and injuries and to really understand and analyse each instance, build trends and enable robust action plans for change.

SB: The H&S landscape must be getting easier right – the use of better technology, better kit and Management Information; so, were there any really difficult challenges? ME: Not right Steve!! None of the above makes it any easier. The essence of good safety is understanding why people or organisations make the choices they do. The choices that lead to bad safety outcomes. In Old Speak we used to call this 'Human Error'. Here at UPP, we don't accept Human Error as a root cause. Instead we ask why did the individual make the choices they did? What organisational pressures or signals influenced their behaviour? In this sense technology has no significant impact, injuries are always the result of choices made somewhere in the organisation.

SB: H&S is quite invisible isn't it – how do you make it relevant to people's everyday lives?

ME: I agree that it *can* be invisible, but it's not here. Our safety communications are bright, positive and engaging. They have been developed by media professionals. Our safety people are engaging, visible and coach rather than tell. We don't use traditional HSE speak.

SB: That's interesting – you're an Executive of the business and an HSE leader but you did not have a long history specifically in this function. Has that been a help or a hinderance? ME: It's been a help. It has allowed me to focus on leadership, communication and change rather than H&S. I have a great team who have a depth of technical knowledge who guide me and pull me back if I stray too far.

SB: Was it hard to change perceptions of HSE when you shifted towards a coaching type of two-way relationship? ME: Yes, because our customers were usually asking for and expecting immediate answers. We try to help customers help themselves. There is an expectation of getting direction and knowledge, but better learning can be achieved through a coaching approach.

SB: What's next in SHE as a profession in your opinion? ME: I believe we are entering the 3rd age of safety, a bit like my Fix, Focus, Grow model. The 1st age was the provision of physical barriers; guards etc. The 2nd age has been about designing out issues through processes and systems. The 3rd age will be moving away from process / systems to concentrate on really understanding human behaviour and how it can be influenced. This will be a real challenge for the institutions and many leaders who can be very reluctant to move beyond age 2, where much investment has been made.

SB: How is Mental Health connected? ME: If we genuinely care about the wellbeing of our people whilst they are at work, we must consider keeping them safe and healthy. I reckon 85% of resource goes into safety. Yet health is equally important. When discussing health, most people talk of the physical aspects, but the workplace can have a profound impact on our mental health. So, for me, we need to realign our investment and spend significant sums on educating our people on how to lead in a way that promotes good mental health. SB: That's a good point about where the emphasis and imbalance lies.

SB: If there were one guiding principle or piece of advice for other organisations looking to improve their H&S performance what would it be? ME: Think of HSE as another continuous improvement activity and use the tools available to make a difference. We have used the Kaizen technique of 5S to improve the workplace, reduce stress and remove several unsafe conditions.

Also, focus on causing less injury rather than being obsessed with compliance. Looking after the former will take care of the latter!

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