PRESIDENT'S PAGE

Success can be measured in various ways—winning a gold medal, completing a college degree or landing that “perfect job.” For those of us in biological safety, success is personified in the healthy scientists, health care workers and support personnel who safely handle hazardous biological agents at work. Throughout my career, I’ve had the opportunity to support numerous organizations and realize that the key to success in safety is embodied in three concepts: vision, leadership, and innovation.

Creating an organizational vision for safety is the hub from which all other efforts flow. At Johnson & Johnson, CEO Ralph Larsen articulates his vision for safety by stating, “Johnson & Johnson will be the world leader in health and safety by creating an injury-free workplace.” The biological safety professional is a member of a multi-disciplinary team whose mission is to be a “partner in the prevention of injuries and illness.” Note that the vision is owned by the CEO, not the safety department. This results in full communication and deployment throughout the organization. Success is possible only when the vision is owned by the head of the organization.

Leadership is the vehicle that drives the organization toward its vision. Without it, the clarity of the vision fades and positive efforts are soon derailed. To be effective leaders, biological safety professionals must develop two critical skills—influence and salesmanship. Influence becomes possible when we take the time to understand the businesses we support and their underlying values. Then, we can tie biological safety to business goals and make it an integral part of daily operations. Salesmanship is required to convince others of the value of our mission. The work we do is extremely important and its contribution to institutional success cannot be overemphasized. Our simple, yet powerful message should be: when biological safety programs are successful, people are healthy.

Innovation in biological safety will allow us to eliminate many sources of exposure. Consider the following problem: What can we do to prevent lacerations with contaminated sharps? One could answer with a fairly predictable response, such as: “Use a syringe with a retractable needle to deliver medication.” An innovative approach will challenge the drug delivery process to eliminate the sharp entirely. Can we challenge our institutions to eliminate breakable labware and pipettes? How about automating repetitive lab operations? If we’re successful, we not only eliminate an aerosol risk but also significantly reduce the potential for repetitive motion injuries. When the Class II biological safety cabinet was introduced, it was an innovative solution to the problem of simultaneous protection of personnel and product. Innovations will continue to be born if we constantly challenge the status quo and continuously strive for improvement.

So how does this sound—I see a workplace where all biological hazards have been identified, sufficient controls have been implemented, and injuries and illness are unheard of? Seem impossible? Its not! Just formulate a vision for success, lead your organization to it and innovate along the way. You’ll be surprised at how quickly vision becomes reality.