

# Governing Energy

## Sending the Message

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Leadership begins at the top. How the upper management sets the environment is how the organization will respond. Executive leadership is faced with two major challenges when implementing transformative change; staying the change course and assuring its verbal/non-verbal messages and those of key personnel do not send mixed messages.

One of the main challenges transforming an organization into one of a Culture of Safety is the sustainability of top management. Changing an organization or industry sector's culture is a long process.

One study from the health care industry suggested that the transformation to a Culture of Safety might take a full generation or up to 20 years.<sup>i</sup> While many believe this transformation can be completed much faster than that, the point is that it may transcend the stewardship of multiple top executives and board members. This is particularly an issue when many senior personnel are recruited from outside the firm.

We all know cases where management and/or other key players are not truly onboard. With a *wink-and-a-nod* the message is sent that is OK to work around the edges of regulations, business processes or other procedures designed to assure top performance in a safe and environmentally friendly manner. The attitude is often one of *just waiting this out so we can get back to the way we have always done things*.

Building a new sustained culture means staying on message forever. As Winston Churchill is noted for saying, "Never give in—never, never, never, never, in nothing great or small, large or petty, never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy."<sup>ii</sup> So it is with organizational transformation.

## **How does your organization assure that its positive messages are sustained?**

### About the Author

Dr. [Scott M. Shemwell](#) has over 30 years technical and executive management experience primarily in the energy sector. He is the author of two books and has written extensively about the field of operations management. Shemwell is also the CEO of Knowledge Ops, Inc.; a firm that focuses on providing its customers with solutions enabling operations excellence and regulatory compliance management.

## End Notes

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.emscultureofsafety.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Strategy-for-a-National-EMS-Culture-of-Safety-NEMSAC-DRAFT.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://townhall.com/columnists/johnhawkins/2013/01/19/the-40-greatest-quotes-from-winston-churchill-n1492794/page/full> (some argue that this is not the exact transcript of the speech, but readers will get the point)