# Safe Work Practices and the Leadership Factor

## How Actions of Leaders Drive Behaviors in the Field

**Dwight Miller**

**Senior Director, Safety Training & Loss Prevention**

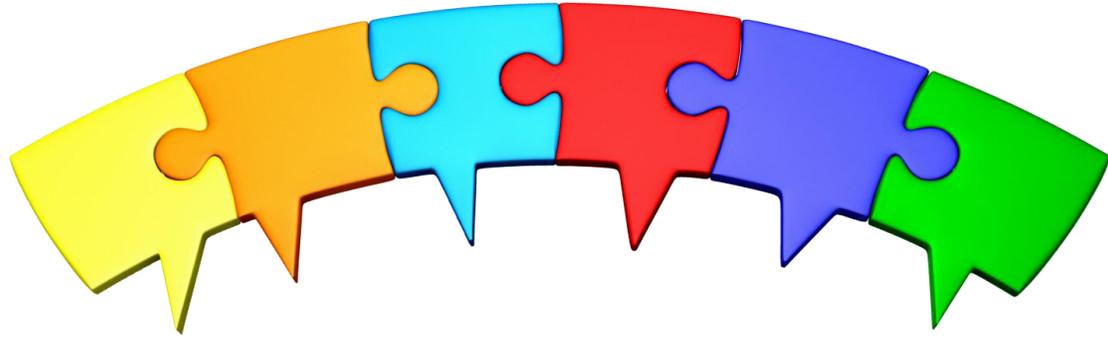**Ohio's Electric Cooperatives**

**OEC Winter Conference Feb 10, 2026**

# *What Would You do?*

## Human Error Incident

# I. CONTEXT IS KING

CAUTION CRIME SCENE DO NOT ENTER

# BROKEN WINDOWS THEORY

**BROKEN RULES THEORY**

people make mistakes

blame fixes nothing

context drives behaviour

learning is vital

response matters

# HUMAN & ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE PRINCIPLES

# "SENSATION-SEEKING PERSONALITY TRAIT

Personality Trait Contributing to *TAKING RISKS*

OFTEN EXTROVERTED
OVER CONFIDENCE
EASILY BORED AND RESTLESS
IMPATIENT
NON-ROUTINE
UNPREDICTABLE / FREE-SPIRITED
EXPLORE NEW THINGS

# "HARM-AVOIDANCE" PERSONALITY TRAIT

Personality Trait Contributing to *RISK AVOIDANCE*

OFTEN INTROVERTED

CAUTIOUS IN UNFAMILIAR SITUATIONS

INTENTIONAL IN ACTIONS

LIKES TO STEP BACK AND RE-ASSESS

CONSERVATIVE TENDENCIES

LIKES ROUTINE

PATIENT

# CONTEXT

**A worker's environment is a more important factor in resisting SHORTCUTS than a worker's natural tendencies or convictions.**

Shortcuts *SEEN* = shortcuts *DONE*

*Safe Work Practices SEEN = Safe Work Practices DONE*

# SO...HOW CAN WE CREATE/MAINTAIN SUCH AN ENVIRONMENT?

# CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT CONDUCIVE TO SAFE WORK PRACTICES
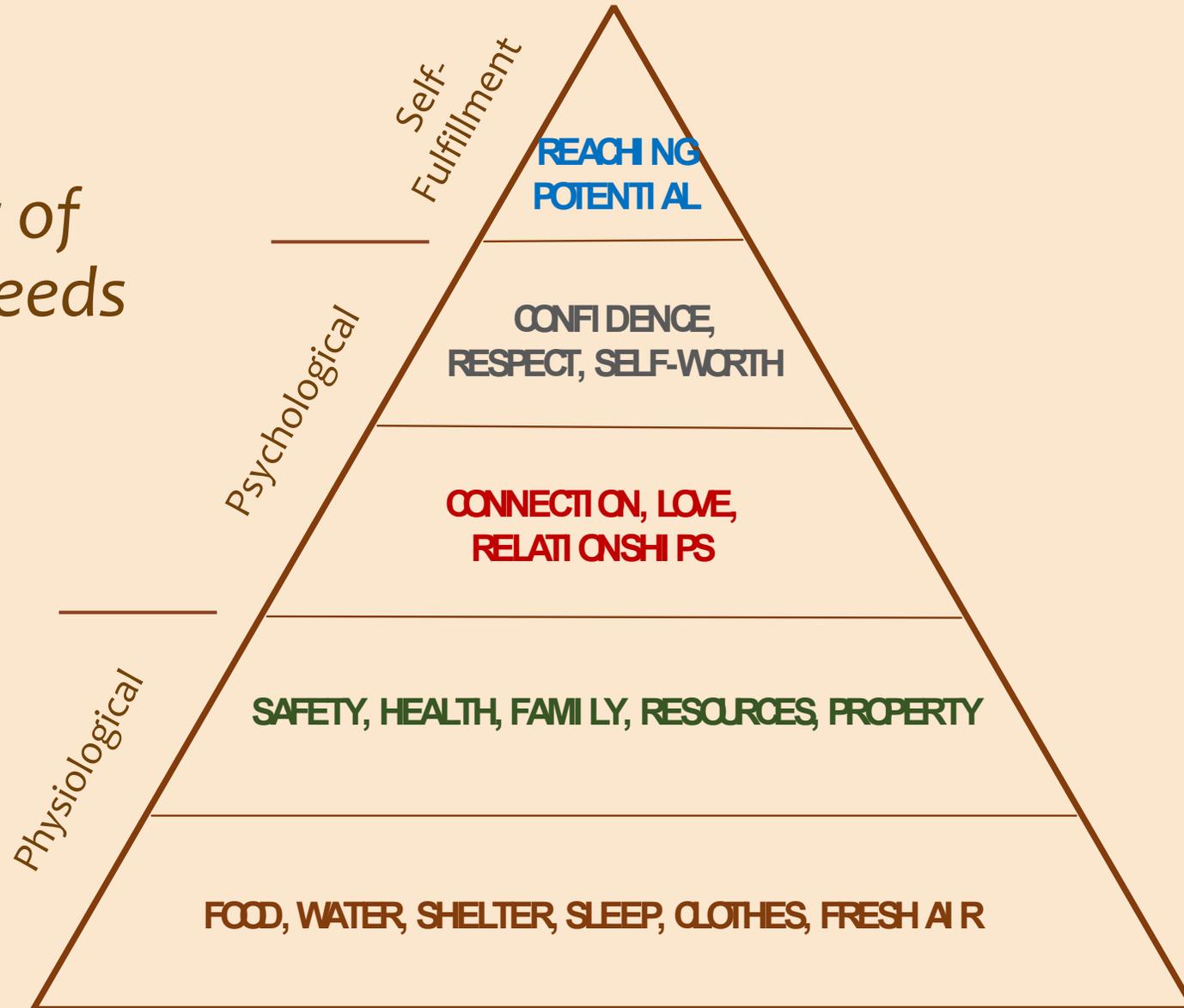
## 1.PEOPLE MATTER THE MOST

**Great culture is simply the synergy that is created among good people who work together in a structured environment with a great organization.**

# 2. CLARITY IN EXPECTATIONS

Inclusive in decisions, then…"This is the direction we are moving. I need you to get on board."

Understand the various levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs

Self-Fulfillment

Psychological

Physiological

REACHING POTENTIAL

CONFIDENCE, RESPECT, SELF-WORTH

CONNECTION, LOVE, RELATIONSHIPS

SAFETY, HEALTH, FAMILY, RESOURCES, PROPERTY

FOOD, WATER, SHELTER, SLEEP, CLOTHES, FRESH AIR

# 3. IS IT SAFE TO GIVE THE BOSS BAD NEWS? (SYDNEY DEKKER)

**Psychological safety: safe to take interpersonal risks: i.e., speaking up with ideas, asking questions, admitting mistakes, or offering concerns (TMGT!!)**

# 'Culture is the sum of what you PERMIT and what you PROMOTE.'

- Richard Fagerlin

**Permit + Promote = Culture**

# II. SIF PREVENTION IS INTENTIONAL

**Leading Indicators**

Strong Hiring Program
Effective Onboarding
Training Goals
Life-Saving Rules Emphasis
Emergency Procedures
Altered Duties Storm Training
Safety Coach not Cop
Crew Leader Training
Journeyman Refresher

# WHO VOLUNTEERS TO REPORT THE FIRST LOST-TIME INCIDENT IN 7 YEARS?

**DART**

DAYS AWAY, RES, TRANS

**TRIR**

RECORDABLE INC RATE

"ZERO IS A NOBLE ASPIRATION, BUT IT'S A TERRIBLE TARGET" (SYDNEY DEKKER)

True or False?

# DEEPWATER HORIZON

# BP's "CULTURE OF COMPLACENCY"

On April 20, 2010, BP's Deepwater Horizon drill rig exploded in the Gulf of Mexico

- Three companies involved: **BP, Halliburton, and Transocean**

- 11 workers killed

- 17 workers injured

- One of the worst environmental disasters in American history.

- Over 87 days, numerous attempts to cap the gushing Macondo well failed

- On July 15, 2010, the flow was finally stopped, and an estimated 171 million gallons of oil had leaked into the Gulf of Mexico.

- Investigation by the President's Commission revealed the root cause as "A CULTURE OF COMPLACENCY"

# RESAP Safety Health Check

**Section 4:** Incident Investigation And Case Management

1 Incident Investigation Process

2 Written Procedure Forms

3 Root Cause Identification and Follow-up Action

4 Accident Investigation Training

How would you score your incident analysis program?

WE HAVE TO LEARN TO GET BETTER!!

# III. PERCEPTION IS REALITY

# Is It **Operations + Safety?**

## Or do you

# *OPERATE SAFELY?*

*Because if Safety is Something Extra...*

**Operations** + ~~Safety?~~

Get 'er
Done!!

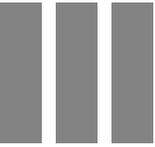# Operating Safely is the Future of Safety

**QUESTION:**

**Is there <u>one</u> Specific Attribute that Sets Great Linemen Apart?**
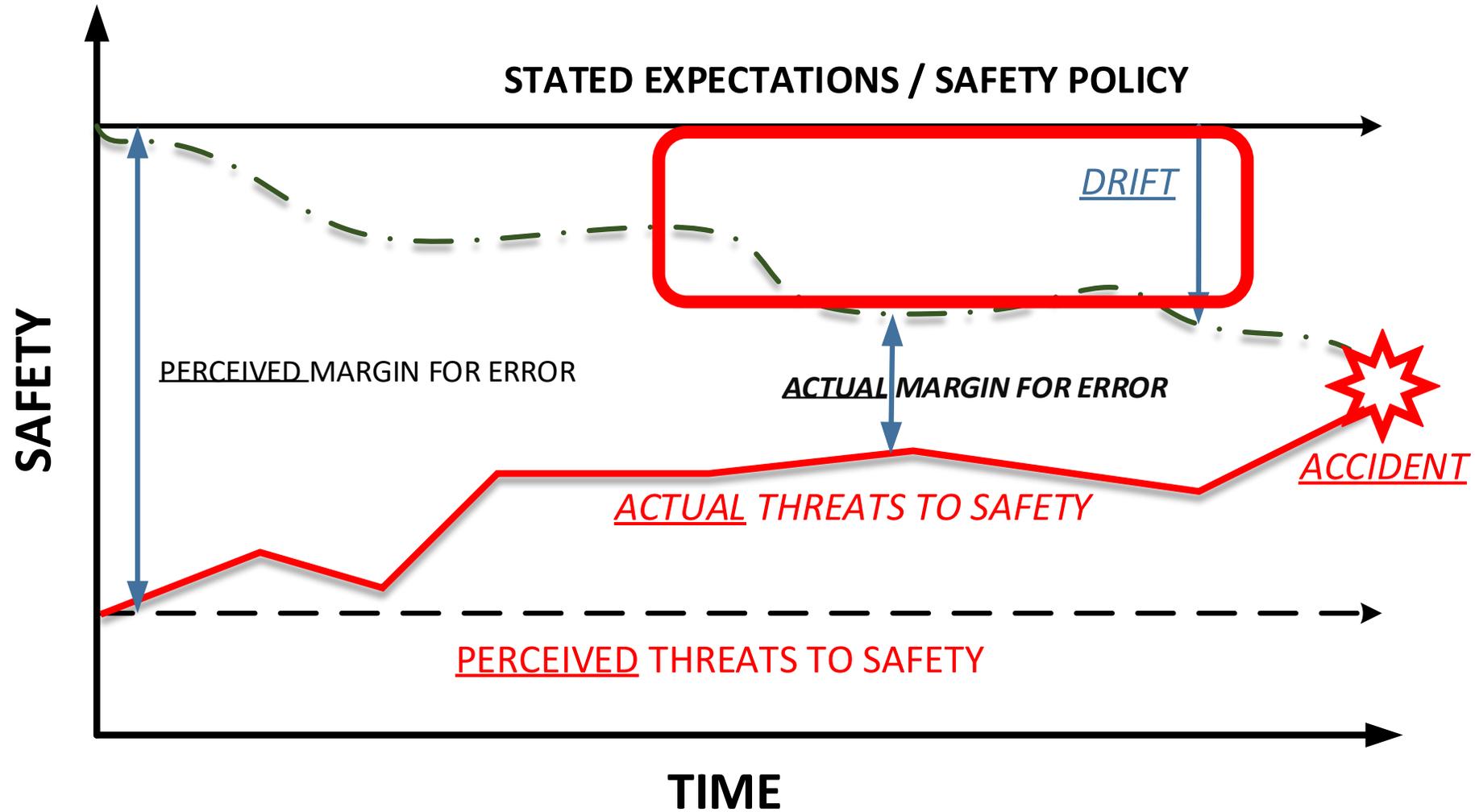
THE BEST LINEMEN...

THE ABILITY TO

ADAPT

# *DRIFT* IS A MAIN TRAIT OF ADAPTIVE HUMAN BEHAVIOR

This natural trait is one of the things that causes people to take shortcuts but also be innovative.

**Solution? Clear expectations, constant reinforcement, open dialog, crew observations, and development of good habits.**

# OPERATIONAL "DRIFT"



**STATED EXPECTATIONS / SAFETY POLICY**

*DRIFT*

PERCEIVED MARGIN FOR ERROR

*ACTUAL MARGIN FOR ERROR*

SAFETY

*ACTUAL THREATS TO SAFETY*

*ACCIDENT*

PERCEIVED THREATS TO SAFETY

**TIME**

# Human Error Cycle in a WEAK Safety Culture



Human Error Incident

Knee-Jerk Reaction/Blame

Discipline Administered at Surface Level

Trust Erodes

Open Communication Stops

Management Unaware of Issues
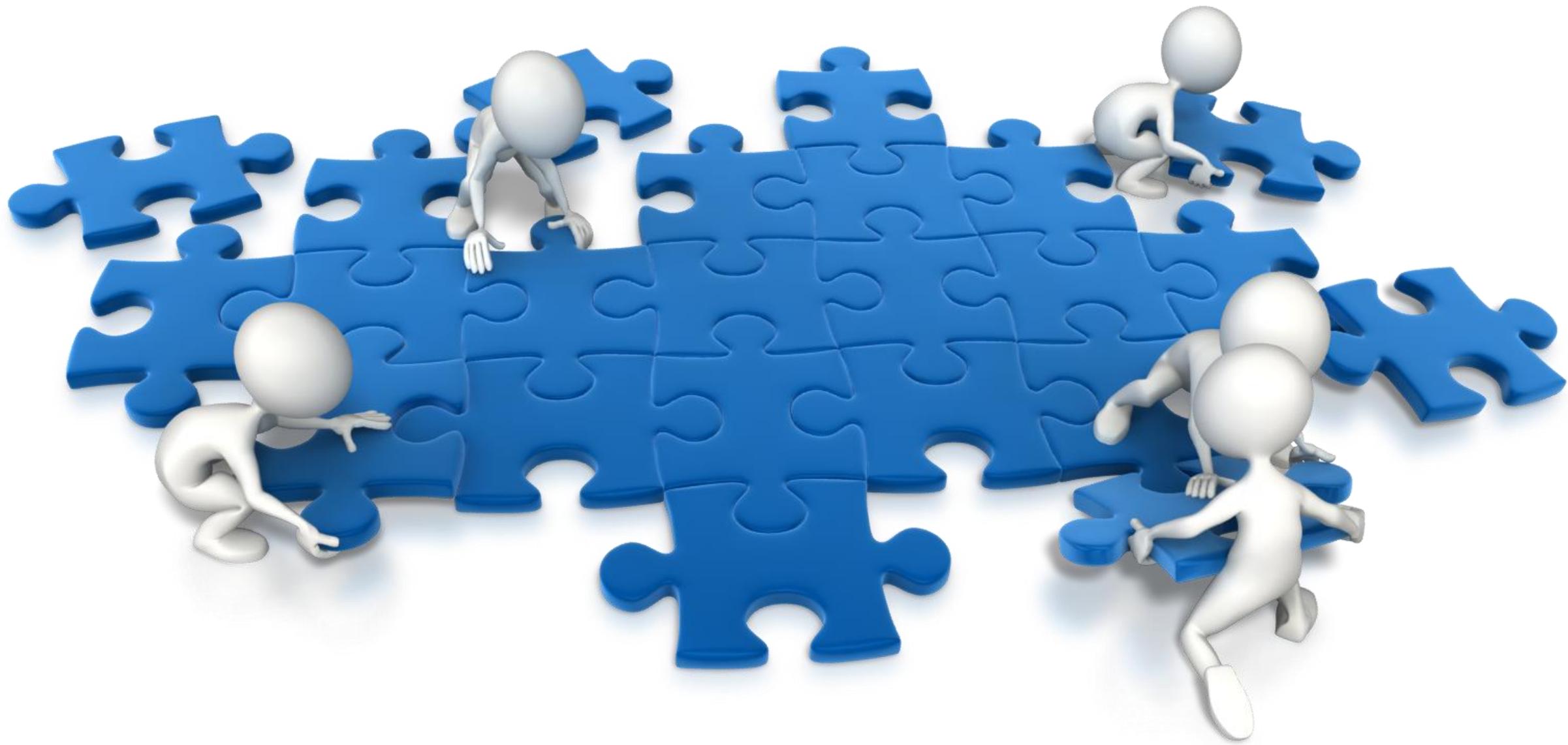
Organizational Weaknesses Persist
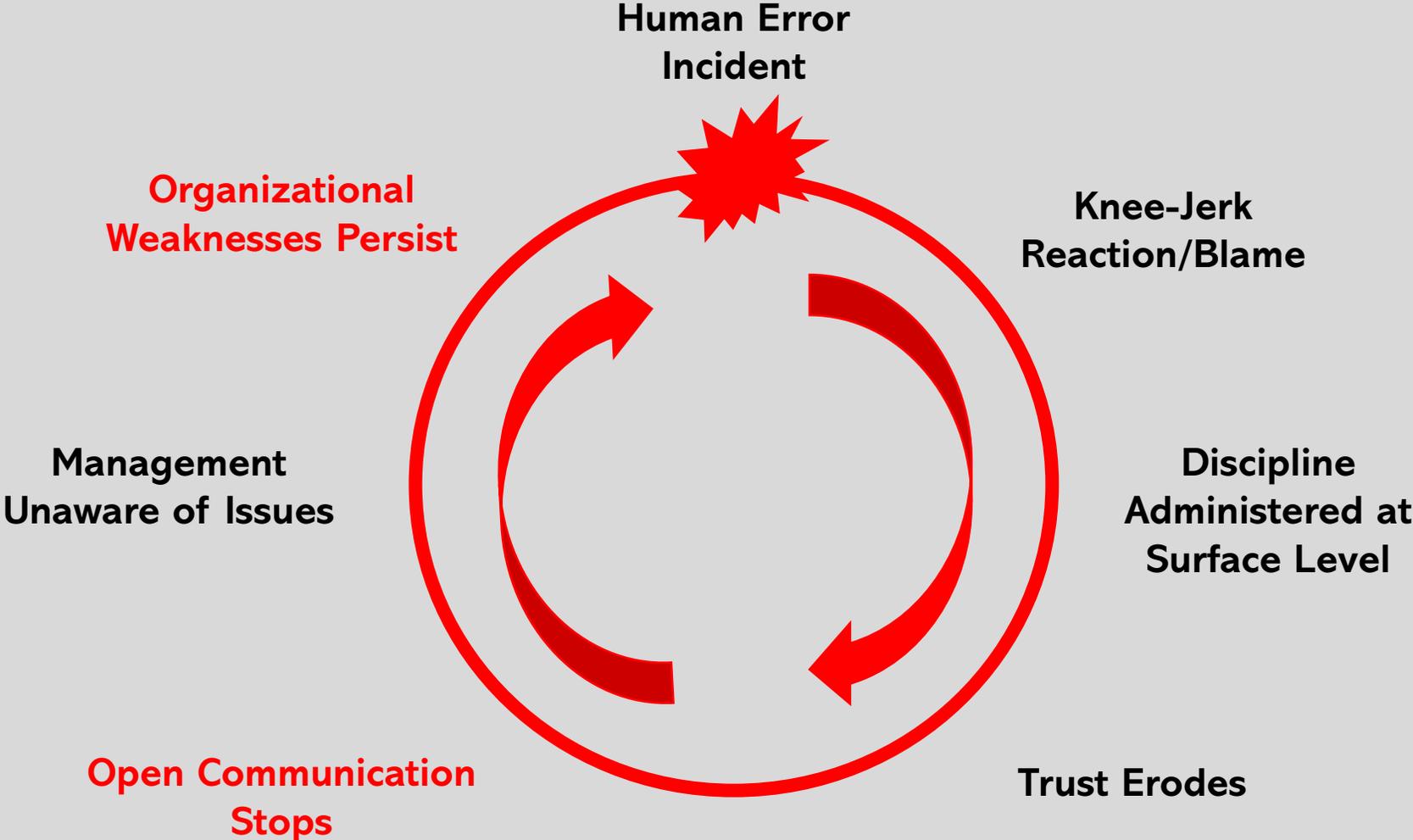
# How STRONG Cultures Grow STRONGER
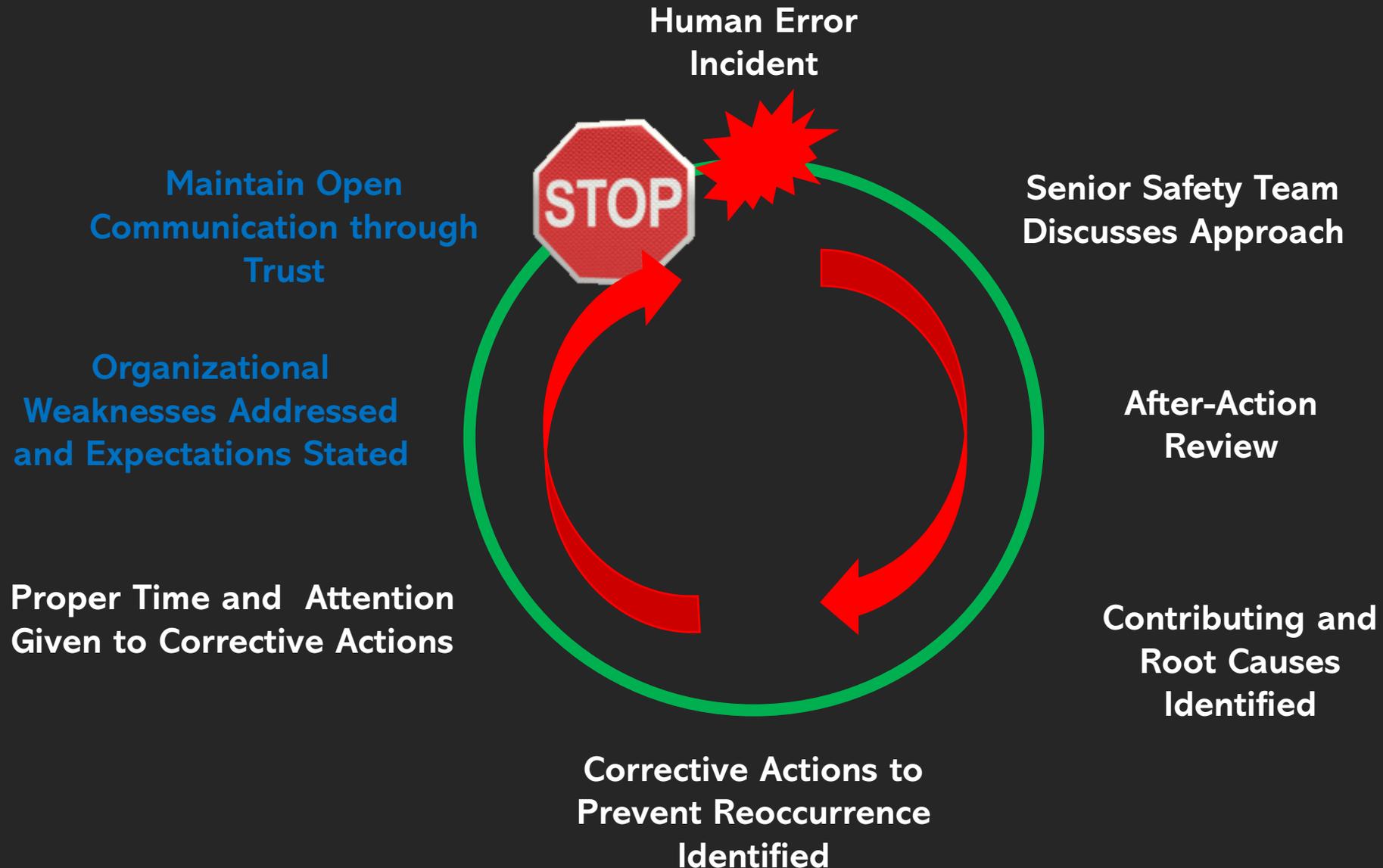
# "THE ENORMOUS RADIO"

*by John Cheever*

# TWO HANDOUTS

## Leadership Actions That Strengthen Safety Culture

*One-Page Guide for CEOs and Senior Staff*

### 1. Lead With Visible Commitment
- Open all-staff meetings with a safety message tied to co-op work
- Drive initiatives for the Safety Improvement Plan and hold folks accountable
- Attend safety meetings; ask your workers about their specific approach concerning the topic during the meeting, and reinforce the message
- Conduct field visits using proper PPE and FR/AR clothing and ask questions
- Attend weekly in-house safety meetings; ensure engagement at all levels

### 2. Make Safety a Strategic Priority
- Embed safety goals into the cooperative's strategic plan
- Tie leadership evaluations to safety engagement and leading indicators
- Ensure safety is represented in budgeting, workforce planning, and technology decisions

### 3. Model an Environment of Care, Learning, and Open Communication
- Model vulnerability, authenticity, integrity, and care
- Model humility, fallibility, and accessibility for Speak Up Listen Up culture
- Ask field leaders the specific actions they are taking to set the tone for open communication from the entire crew, especially junior employees
- Ask leaders their fail-safe plan when observing high-hazard operations
- Create regular conversations with frontline workers concerning their tasks
- Normalize speaking up, stopping work, and questioning assumptions
- Debrief after storms and incidents with a focus on learning, not blame

## Board Actions That Strengthen Safety Culture

*One-Page Governance Guide for Trustees*

### 1. Governance Leadership
- Make safety the first agenda item at every board meeting
- Adopt a board-level safety commitment statement
- Ensure safety is embedded in strategic planning and board policy
- Reinforce that no operational priority outranks safety

### 2. Visible Board Engagement
- Recognize safe behaviors of employees during board meetings
- Acknowledge lagging metric success; keep focus on leading indicators.
- In the boardroom, recognize employees who are leading the charge in safety

### 3. Oversight With Purpose
- Review leading indicators (near miss reports, in-house safety meetings, etc.)
- Expect incident analysis report from SIF-related near misses, not just injuries
- Review co-op Safety Improvement Plan progress on a quarterly basis
- Seek co-op after-action reviews with a focus on learning and improvement
- Ensure non-negotiable safety policy or procedures exist for life-saving rules
- Support OEC and NRECA safety initiatives

### 4. Support for the CEO & Safety Leadership
- Ensure leadership has authority and resources to enforce safety expectations
- Back management when work is paused for safety concerns
- Approve budgets that prioritize safety-critical equipment and training

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THANK YOU!!

FOR EVERYTHING!!!

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