

# Behavioural Safety

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## Strengthening your safety culture: a tale of two leaders

By Andrew Sharman Posted March 31, 2016 In Behavioural Safety, Blog, Trending



**Andrew Sharman describes how a week in Siberia, alongside battling the cold, has left him intrigued by two leaders with different styles and how they can be used to motivate and influence.**

I've just returned from a week of work in Siberia: three flights, two taxis, and a train ride, it was certainly a long way from home. It's Russia at its most remote.

I'm no stranger to long-distance travel: the previous week I'd been working in Durban, South Africa. Over there it'd been 35 degrees Celsius, scorching sunshine and warm, smiling faces, while all week in Siberia I had been well wrapped up in my goose-down jacket, woolly hat and gloves and thermal underwear – minus 25 Celsius is no joke.

As I wandered downtown, dodging Russian drivers, while simultaneously focusing on the snow and ice beneath my

feet, it was clear that the relaxed flip-flops, sunshine and smiles of South Africa had been replaced with a more sombre attitude of 'Let's just do what we need to do and then get back into the warm'. With a temperature difference of 60 degrees between my work locations, and a physical distance of 7,104 miles, it felt like I was on a different planet.

No matter where I find myself in the world, I'm always intrigued by the local culture. In post-apartheid South Africa there's a burning desire for learning and growth. Many are keen to point out that their nation is 'second' or even 'third world' in comparison to Europe.

Despite still being 'under development' there's a sense of pride for the journey so far and a calm, understated confidence that the future is bright. Working with clients there always brings a smile to my face as I see people from different backgrounds coming together to demonstrate a strong sense of community, team-spirit and a mindful dedication to improving workplace safety.

Despite the chill in the air, Siberia showed similar signs of humility and hunger when it came to improving safety. Working with the top team of an oil company, during our workshops we'd been discussing how to develop safety culture and build authentic safety leadership. We'd been exploring classical styles of leadership and with many of the executives present coming from engineering backgrounds they identified with the *transactional* style as their own natural or 'default' style.

Typically, process-oriented, transactional leaders are skilled in planning, direction and facilitation. They quickly get things under control and are expert at identifying and driving appropriate action. These are the leaders that 'find and fix' and 'make things happen'.

Unusually, the Siberian company is run by *two* chief executives. Nicolay is the visionary, having strategically plotted out the corporate direction well into the future. For Marina, a tightly-focused former lawyer with a disarmingly warm smile, nothing is a problem.

*Servant* leaders, like Marina, can appear selfless, concentrating on how they can support others in achieving their tasks and goals. Totally committed, with high levels of awareness and empathy, they are excellent listeners. Servant leaders actively seek out opportunities to help, bringing teams together and building a sense of pride and community.

*Transformational* leaders (like Nicolay) are those who have energy and drive in abundance. Usually highly charismatic, they use their ability to look ahead to create a vision for their organisation's prosperity. Attentive to the needs of others, they paint clear pictures that persuade others to follow and support their cause.

The combined joint leadership at the oil company got me thinking. It's not unusual for an engineering company to have a wealth of transactional leaders – after all, getting oil out of the ground is key – but could the blend of servant and transformational leaders at the top provide a more effective climate for engineering mindsets to prosper and safety excellence to flourish? I suspect it does.

Whilst leadership style should certainly be relevant to context, great safety leadership – combining transactional, servant and transformational elements – may just be the secret to bringing smiles to faces, warming the team spirit and helping us create safety excellence – no matter where we are in the world.

So what's your natural leadership style? Do you adapt your style depending on the situation you're in? Which servant,

transactional and transformational leaders could you recruit as safety ambassadors in your business to help you provide an effective climate to further strengthen your organisation's safety culture?

*Andrew's book [From Accidents to Zero](#) is one of the fastest-selling books on safety culture of the 21st century, find out more at [www.fromaccidentstozero.com](http://www.fromaccidentstozero.com) and enter code **SH25** to receive an **exclusive 25% discount** for SHPonline readers.*

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