



SPOTLIGHT ON OUR LEADERS

New Zealand's Safety II explorer

Jono Brent is often the name people drop when discussing Safety II or Safety Differently. As a finalist in the Leader of the Year category at the 2019 Health and Safety Awards, we spoke to Jono about what he's learnt as a leader promoting significant change, and the key ingredients for your own successful Safety Differently journey.

Life before February 22, 2011



Jono Brent is refreshingly honest about what influenced his safety leadership journey. *"Really, up until I was CEO of Connetics at the end of 2010 I didn't really think about health and safety. It wasn't on my radar, and I didn't really know how to approach it."*

So, what changed?

The immediate aftermath of the earthquakes saw the organisation take a dramatic shift in the way it was operating. Due to the nature of the response needed by Connetics, which builds and maintains overhead and underground lines, the company switched into a people-led organisation. *"People had to be the solution, there was no process or system about how to respond. We had people working up to 16-hour days to restore essential services, yet they felt valued because they were at the heart of the decision-making."*

In that post-earthquake period Connetics also recorded its safest-ever period, despite the long hours and extremely challenging conditions. Jono recalls, *"even years afterwards we had people saying 'can't we go back to how we worked just after the earthquake?'"*

Getting started on Safety Differently

After attending a psychology of safety conference in Sydney in 2015, meeting Safety II innovator Daniel Hummerdal (now with WorkSafe NZ) and then attending a masterclass, Jono was introduced to a world of Safety Differently. *"It was something I had never heard of, but as I listened, I realised, this is about work, not just safety."*

It prompted Jono to start an embedded discovery at Connetics to find out what it was really like to work for the company, and identify gaps between 'work as imagined' and 'work as done.' *"It was a watershed moment. There were things we were doing as an organisation which were not serving our people."* That was the start of Connetics Differently.

Safety II in action

Connetics Differently has included 'explorations' and micro-experiments, such as bold decisions to focus on measuring the 'presence of health and safety' – rather than just traditional lag indicators. Work Improvement teams were set up and given a licence to make 'micro improvements' across the business. They focused on fixing small things that caused long-term frustration. For example, they fixed problems with the Connetics laundry service that had gotten so bad, most people were opting to wash their overalls at home. This created a safety issue because residential detergents can degrade the overalls' ability to protect workers from arc flashes.

One of the side benefits of Connetics Differently is that staff turnover has reduced from 15% to 10% over the past two years.

"It's about work, not just safety. It's about thinking about people all the time, setting your people up for success."

What's holding other leaders back?

Jono says when he talks to other leaders, most agree Safety Differently is a great concept, but they're often restrained by three common things:

- How do I actually do this?
- How do I get my Board to agree?
- How will the regulator react to it?

His answer to the first question: just start. Start somewhere in the business where you really want to understand what's going on. *"Be curious and open. Ask questions focusing on what the organisation can learn, rather than who is to blame."*

"I would also strongly highlight that as a leader you have to truly believe your people are the solution. Even if that solution may sometimes be frightening – you can't hold the control. There are two ways to approach safety in my view; control or enable."

Getting your Board on side

This is not going to happen overnight and Jono says leaders need to be able to challenge the conversation at the top table. *"Be clear on the outcomes you're wanting to achieve. It took about 12 months, including bringing in people to speak to the Board and encouraging them to attend Forum events."*

Connetics are led by a board who truly believe in the capability of the people being the heart of the organisation.

Now at a Connetics Board meeting you won't see any lag measures such as LTI reporting, instead you'll hear conversations about things that really matter like critical risk near misses, employee wellbeing and psychological safety. This aligns well with the Safety II principle that *safety is the presence of an environment/capacity that enables things to go right*, rather than the absence of incidents.

The relationship with the regulator is as Jono describes a 'work in progress' but one that involves great dialogue. *"It's clear they're willing to be open with appointments like their new Chief Innovation Advisor."* Jono says it's really important to be

transparent, *"if you're going to try to change things or try something different, you need to open your doors and share the journey."*

Ethical leadership

Jono is clear: Safety II is not an initiative. *"It's about work, not just safety. It's about thinking about people all the time, setting your people up for success."*

Jono's leadership is based on his belief that people should be better off (mentally and physically) for being at work. So much so, Connetics has now just employed a new 'Head of Human Potential' with the aim of designing work in a way that supports people and with the belief that, *"everyone is better off for working at Connetics."*

Jono's tips for success with Safety Differently

- Truly understand and believe that people are the solution
- Be the enabler, instead of the one in control
- Be transparent, curious and entirely open to new ideas
- You're not alone – if you're fearful of taking the first step, many others are too.



Leaders make a difference

The Business Leaders' Health and Safety Forum inspires and supports its members to become more effective leaders on health and safety. The Forum has more than 350 members, who are CEOs or Managing Directors of significant New Zealand companies.

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