



SPOTLIGHT ON OUR LEADERS

Putting safety leadership into practice

As a CEO, James Fletcher has a successful track record in leading health and safety across a diverse range of businesses – and he’s getting results. We spoke to James, a finalist in the Leader of the Year category at the 2015 and 2019 Health and Safety Awards, about how to get an organisation’s culture humming and finding new solutions to persistent problems.

Setting expectations



In January 2018, when James Fletcher took over as CEO of Treescap[®] its Total Recordable Injury Frequency Rate (TRIFR) was 49. Twenty three months later it was 15.

"I know TRIFR has its issues as a measurement, but it's a good starting point in any organisation. We made quite a bit of

difference to those statistics in quite a short time. The nature of accidents are far less severe and reporting is going up, which is great – we don't want to hide this stuff."

So, how did he lead the change required for such a turnaround?

"Well, I have a bit of practice at it in my previous roles, which has enabled me to really hone my approach."

Following the golden 'eight practices'

"Really, I'm just following the Forum's eight practices, setting expectations and aiming to set the bar high," James says.

He's referring to the *Eight practices of a world-class CEO safety leader* produced by the Forum and Leading Safety.

"It's also really important to build the support for your expectations with your senior management team and ask the difficult but important questions such as 'what's holding us back?' and 'how could we make a difference?'"

Personalising the H and the S

"In every organisation I've gone into I've realised I've had to personalise safety, and to personalise it to every individual in the business. It's really important that people understand the concept of looking after yourself and your mates at work."

"You'll always have your cynics, but understanding their motivation is crucial – as is repetition of the same safety mantra. If you stop talking about health and safety it's a failure of leadership, and people will notice."



Eight practices of a world-class CEO safety leader

- 1 Clarify the vision
- 2 Recognise contributions
- 3 Invest in health and safety
- 4 Manage the risks
- 5 Get personally involved
- 6 Monitor the right outcomes
- 7 Engage your people
- 8 Let your people get on with it

“All these health-related issues contribute to each other and ultimately to incidents at work, so focusing on them is crucial.”

Figuring out fatigue management

Personalising health and safety was also a way in for James to implement a new approach to fatigue.

“Fatigue is a big and persistent issue for us. A few months after I started as CEO, we encountered major storms in Auckland, and people were working really long hours. We were conscious people were physically tired and I know often people feel pressured to turn up to work even when they’re exhausted.

“At the same time, we had refreshed our business strategy to focus on our core beliefs. Ultimately it came down to: manaakitanga (the process of showing respect, generosity and care for others) and kaitiakitanga (trusteeship and stewardship) – but it was important to us that this was extended not just to the sustainability of the green assets we are working with, but the sustainability of our people.

“So, we said to everyone in the business, if you’ve not had a good night’s sleep, or you’re feeling tired at work and working in a high-risk area, please stick your hand up and let your supervisor know. You can still work today, but perhaps on a ground-based or low-risk job.

“A few eyebrows shot up when we introduced it, but we emphasised that the people doing the work were the best ones to tell if they were tired. It was about creating a safe environment. We had to make sure frontline managers and supervisors were on board with the approach, but people soon realised I was serious.”

Treescape® employees are now using this approach to let their managers know when they’re not safe to work, and James says to date no one has abused it.

Investment in mental health and hearing loss awareness

Another focus of James has been a significant investment in the health and wellbeing of the workforce.

“We have rolled out mental health first aid training to all frontline teams and managers at Treescape® across the country.”

Has he seen any benefits?

“For one, people are talking about mental health and it is out in the open. We’ve also seen a spike in EAP queries which is really positive, as people are using the service more. It’s also resulting in a more caring work environment, one where we don’t have to be super-human, and it’s ok to be vulnerable.”

Linked closely with fatigue and mental ill health is the issue of noise and hearing loss, a major issue for Treescape® and the industry.

James and his team have established a partnership with the National Foundation for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and will shortly achieve accreditation under its Hearing Accredited Workplace Programme.

“All these health-related issues contribute to each other and ultimately to incidents at work, so focusing on them is crucial,” says James.

James’ tips for successful H&S leadership

1. Do your research and due diligence when you start a leadership role. Get to know the key risks and really get a sense of what’s going on in the business
2. You don’t have to change the world on day one. Think long and hard about your health and safety message to the organisation, and importantly, personalise it, repeat it as much as possible, and be consistent.
3. Take any opportunity to go out into your business and listen to the people doing the work. They have great ideas and often most of the answers.

James Fletcher is also an active member of the Forum’s Steering Group and Chair of the Leadership Subcommittee.

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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