

INTRO

Introduction to SODAK

I've worked in construction most of my life. I left school at 16 and got a job as a chain-lad for 18 months on a large road job before going to university in 1989 to study civil engineering. I worked for a number of large companies and loved the diversity and range of projects. I loved that we created things from nothing, altering the landscape forever or at least for a little while.

In 1997 I became involved in health and safety by accident (pardon the pun). Frustrated with where I was in my career, I answered an internal advert for a safety manager's role. I didn't get the job but I got the wooden spoon prize; a secondment to the safety department.

To my surprise, it was great. Our leader was someone to whom I will always be grateful. He had a vision that health and safety should be practical. As health and safety managers we should help those tasked with building the project to problem-solve and construct them safely. In doing so we would create great places of work.

Most of us in the department came from a trades background or were engineers. We took a hands-on approach to health and safety; there were no safety officers, only very limited procedures and little bureaucracy. Despite our efforts we had our share of serious incidents and during my time as a safety manager I experienced three tragic fatal events.

I was with this company for eight years developing and defining my understanding of what effective health and safety meant before going on to head up safety departments for other organisations and major civil engineering projects. The last of these involved overseeing a department that managed health, safety, quality, environment and engineering for a major transport project in Edinburgh, Scotland.

I became disheartened and frustrated with the way health and safety was heading. Piles of procedures and paperwork, increasingly patronising initiatives, the incessant preaching that “all harm was preventable” and this misconception that all harm is preventable frustrated me. I mean, come on, how can all harm be preventable when we still rely on people? Safety just isn’t a priority; if it were, we would be given unlimited budget and time.

No, safety has to be a value. Some harm will befall some people during their lives. We need to recognise this and continually improve, not shut down conversations because we are too scared to admit someone, somewhere might get hurt.

In 2008 I encountered a company using behavioural science to improve business performance including things like forecasting and efficiencies. I had been sceptical of the growing wave of behavioural safety initiatives but this seemed like a totally different beast. It was based on collectable, relevant evidence and fact which impressed me. I liked the solidity.

Learning the basic principles of behavioural science made me see why so much of what had been creeping into health and safety seemed like such nonsense. Over the next five years, I studied the subject extensively. I became completely absorbed in understanding why people do what they do.

**“When you run into something interesting
drop everything and study it”**

B.F. Skinner

The more I learnt, the more I could identify the source of the chaos and see the harm caused by ill-informed initiatives. It was obvious we could do better and in 2011 I set up Alternative Safety Ltd to challenge the entrenched thinking about health and safety.

We helped many companies achieve significant change and I soon realised that the problem we faced went beyond the construction sector and wasn't just about health and safety. It became clear that there was a fundamental error in the way we organized people and that we could address this problem by understanding behaviour.

I formed Sodak in 2013 with the express aim of helping people understand people.

Construction and health and safety remain our biggest sector but we have achieved great success in other areas too. We now work across manufacturing, sales, customer service, public transport, utilities and more.

Our team includes academics, consultants, industry experts and specialists. We help organisations improve performance through the application of behavioural science and evidence based management.

Learning this stuff changed our lives and we want to share it! Our goal is to make this accessible to everyone. We encourage you to take our articles and videos and share them with your colleagues, friends and family. In return we'd like you to share your ideas with us. We genuinely love what we do and we are very much looking forward to working with you and taking you on this journey.. Buckle your seat belt Dorothy...

Bob Cummins | Director, Sodak.

NOTE:

At the end of every chapter in this book there is a section with Things to do and think about. Please have a go at these exercises they will enhance the learning experience.

Things to do and think about...

1. What was the path that led you to be where you are today?
2. What would you like to get from this?
3. Anything else you'd like to throw into the mix?

1.

2.

3.

Can you connect up all of these dots with only four straight lines?

