

# Safer Personality



Conventional wisdom says **on-the-job training** that focuses on education, equipment, and protocol leads to safer employees. While this line of thought has certainly lowered the number of workplace injuries, it tends to ignore research that shows that **a worker's personality and behavior** play key roles in creating a culture of safety.



Thankfully, outright catastrophes caused by **human error** aren't an everyday occurrence. When they do happen, however, they often **cost people their lives**. Some key incidents demonstrate that personality and behavior directly affect whether lives are saved or lost.



**Chernobyl**, the worst nuclear power accident in history, happened on April 26, 1986. Death toll estimates range from 4,000 to 93,000, and costs associated with cleanup, resettlement, and victim compensation total hundreds of billions of dollars. The accident was attributed to defiant power plant operators who failed to follow procedures and safety requirements.



On Jan. 15, 2009, **US Airways Flight 1549** crash-landed in the Hudson River after striking a flock of birds on takeoff and suffering engine failure. All 155 people aboard survived thanks to Captain Chesley Sullenberger and co-pilot Jeff Skiles, whose years of experience and ability to stay calm in an emergency situation are credited with saving the lives of everyone aboard.



A large **construction crane** collapsed in Manhattan on March 15th, 2008, killing seven people and hospitalizing several others in critical condition. New York City's Department of Buildings found that the contractors in charge of the crane were reckless in regard to rigging techniques and that one of the department's inspectors had filed a false inspection report.



# Culture of Safety and the Individual

Businesses spend **\$170 billion** a year on workplace injuries and illnesses, but traditional safety training often ignores the role of employee behavior in workplace safety.

“Organizations can have the best processes in the world, but they forget there is a person involved,” says Ryan Ross, vice president of Global Alliances for Hogan Assessments. “They forget to focus on the individual.”

Because accidents continue despite safety training, personality assessment has become a crucial element in workplace safety programs and initiatives. This raises the question of how differences in employee behavior play a role in overall workplace safety.

“Workers in high-risk occupations appreciate the role an individual plays in creating a safe

environment,” says Ross. “I’ve heard workers say, ‘I just won’t work with that person because he or she is unsafe’ or police and firefighters who may be great co-workers but not the kind of person you want for backup.”

Creating a climate of safety requires organizations to focus on people, not systems. Rather than purchasing a new safety training program or different equipment, organizations can benefit more from an approach that helps them understand and modify the behavior of the employees and creates an environment in which safety is integral to the organization.



Progress in  
**workplace safety**  
and **organizational**  
**health** will advance  
more quickly by  
addressing worker  
behavior in relation to  
**three components.**



## **Worker personality**

“Most managers have a mental list of the employees who they believe are most likely to cause an accident,” says Ross, who has extensive experience working with chemical refineries and is an expert on the implementation of personality assessments. Research shows the factors that cause managers to label some workers safe and others a work-safety risk can be quantified using a highly reliable personality assessment tool.

## **A culture of worker engagement**

Organizations that involve workers in the process of creating a safe environment will have much greater success. Workers want to know that leaders are aware of the real safety issues that surround them throughout the workday, and see that everyone, regardless of their rank in the organization, is a member of a safe team.

## **Organizational leadership**

Creating and maintaining a holistically safe environment requires leaders to know what workers’ safety perceptions are at all levels of the organization. Last, management must integrate a safety-focused mindset into the culture through supervision and coaching of regular work duties, to ensure worker development includes safety.

# The Hogan Approach

With more than **three decades of experience** in helping businesses reduce turnover and increase productivity by hiring the right people, developing key talent, and evaluating leadership potential, **Hogan created SafeSystem** to meet the demands of clients who want to add a safety component to their assessment process.





Hogan SafeSystem identifies **six characteristics** that may lead to on-the-job accidents and other unsafe behaviors. Screening for these characteristics can help organizations **dramatically reduce costs** associated with accidents caused by **human error**.

### **Defiant - Compliant**

High scorers on the compliant scale tend to adhere to organizational guidelines and are usually rule followers. Those on the defiant end often ignore authority and rules, and can be reckless in doing so, causing accidents and injuries.

### **Panicky - Strong**

Those who lean toward the panicky end of the scale often buckle under pressure and make mistakes that could prove to be costly, and possibly even fatal. Those at the other end of the spectrum are steady under pressure.

### **Irritable - Poised**

Poised employees keep their temperament on an even keel, but those who lose their tempers make mistakes by not staying focused.

### **Distractible - Vigilant**

Those who remain focused on the task at hand – usually scoring high on the vigilant side of the scale – tend to be safer than those who are easily distracted.

### **Reckless - Cautious**

Those on the reckless end of the scale tend to take unnecessary risks. Cautious scorers evaluate their options before making risky decisions.

### **Arrogant – Trainable**

Low scorers tend to be arrogant, over-confident, and hard to train. High scorers tend to be trainable, listen to advice, and enjoy learning.



It is critical that **every level of the company** is involved in establishing a safe work environment.

### **Organizational**

It goes beyond simple compliance. The organization must ensure every employee gets feedback about the company's safety levels and must communicate its expectations regarding safety.

### **Management**

Not only do managers need to recognize the employees with the most risk, but they also need to understand how and when to give feedback to help them understand how their personality affects behavior.

### **Employees**

Workers who are aware that their personality characteristics may affect their behavior know to take extra care in safety compliance. Hogan SafeSystem provides valuable information for developing safe work behaviors.

Hogan SafeSystem helps organizations pinpoint the **safety foundation** of their workers. **Based on hundreds of client research projects** conducted over the last 30 years, businesses can predict, and take steps to modify, **unsafe behavior.**



# The Bottom Line

The right combination of **traditional safety training** and **personality assessment** that helps to gauge safety-related behavior can have a **significant impact** on your organization's overall safety and bottom line.

It's true that traditional safety training can help employees become safer. But a crucial part of the safety puzzle has been missing. To create the most comprehensive safety climate, a company has to combine the right traditional safety methods with safety-based personality assessments.

“We evaluate culture and climate in an organization and help them see where we can make immediate improvement, whether it's selecting people who are less accident prone, or remediating, coaching and developing the people currently on staff,” says Ross. “It's all about strategic self-awareness.”



To learn more about Hogan SafeSystem visit [hoganassessments.com](http://hoganassessments.com)