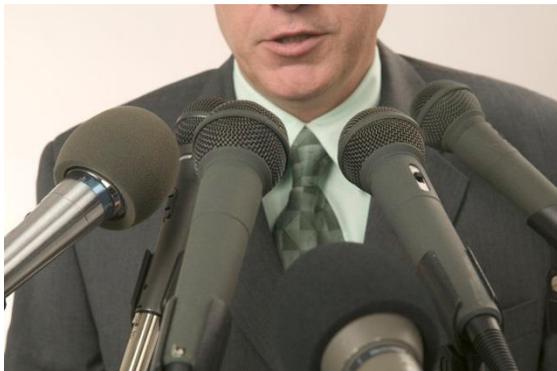


# Calls for corporate manslaughter misguided?

---

The Pike River tragedy has been the catalyst for more onerous penalties, and has even prompted calls for corporate manslaughter, but beating up individuals, boards and their companies won't address New Zealand's underlying Health and Safety problems. Apportioning blame and meting out punishment stops learning and improvement. Unfortunately New Zealanders are prone to blame. Our health and safety surveys of over 10,000 managers and employees expose a 'blame someone or something' mentality that is simply not useful.

Everyone agrees it's time we transformed our shameful health and safety statistics, but are we being seduced by misplaced optimism evidenced by the fact that 'People are our most important asset' is a tired cliché? I'm pretty certain ninety-five percent of all company directors would vehemently agree that an absolute priority for a Board is the safety of its workers, and that it 'stands out if not above, then on par', with the financial performance of their enterprises. But if that was really true, why is the safety of employees (their most important asset) not yet being driven by Boards?



What would happen if a new CEO said, "People and their safety at work really are the most important asset we have – they are more important than financial goals, and I am going to make their health and safety our

number one priority"? I suspect there would be a lot of guffawing. Yet overseas the UK Institute of Directors and Government Health and Safety Executive say: *"Health and safety is integral to success. Board members who do not show leadership in this area are failing in their duty as directors and their moral duty, and are damaging their organisation"*

Are we being unrealistically optimistic to think that more inspectors and the new WorkSafe Agency will protect New Zealand employees? Fines for workplace accidents and deaths are rising, but compare Kim Dotcom's experience and it's easy to see where the priorities lie: raided by 20 armed police; \$17m assets seized; \$218m in cash frozen; spied on by NZ Government Security Bureau; arrested and thrown into prison.

150 years ago workers were expendable; they were just a labour unit used to produce profits. Today employees are still called 'human resources', and dollars still seem to have a greater value placed on them than lives. Will more inspectors, and will more legislation within the same construct really do much to protect New Zealand employees? Just hoping that better Health and Safety Legislation will dramatically improve our frightening workplace injury and death statistics, is not a luxury we should indulge in.

The Government target to reduce serious harm accidents and workplace deaths by 25%, by year 2020, conservatively means more than 400 – 500 employees won't go home to their families alive, and more than 36,000 will be seriously injured during the next 6 years.

Most New Zealand workplaces already provide quality personal protection

equipment, have quality systems and processes, and conduct regular audits, but are we still looking for solutions through the same old lens, and do we really need six years to reduce workplace harm by 25%?

Surely with workplace accidents and deaths among the worst in the developed world, it's time to try a different approach. Currently health and safety is decoupled from business results, I suspect that only when this changes will attitudes towards health and safety transform.

I suggest improvements in health and safety are approached from a different angle.

Hamish Brown  
Managing Director Concordia NZ Ltd  
T: 09 585 0333  
M: 021 67 2226  
E: hamish.brown@concordianz.com  
www.concordianz.com

Measure workplace health and safety culture, the human factors of why beliefs, attitudes and assumptions about health and safety exist, and then task managers and leaders with accountability for changing their own attitudes towards health and safety; for promoting learning; transparency; and measurable improvements. It's about time that we realised that safety is not just the absence of danger, it is a state of mind.

Innovation and a practical 'go get it' attitude is a Kiwi strength we bring to other endeavours, so why can't we bring it to saving lives and trauma at work?