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Abstract

People want to learn. They want to continually improve. We all intuitively know that we could be better and better in almost everything we do. We seek out learning opportunities and especially appreciate safe learning environments where we can grow individually and together. Most of the people we work with are called knowledge workers, *paid to think*.

Many organizations do not help supervisors, managers, and leaders with how to *lead learning* or how to *improve thinking*. More commonly, organizations rely on *traditional transactional training* programs with memorization and process change approaches designed for complicated machinery. From a planning perspective this makes sense as a logical, linear approach where process errors can be identified and rectified easily. However, from an anticipatory perspective, that is, anticipating the unexpected, this does not support the adaptive logic used in changing circumstances and necessary for dynamic error identification and correction. New ways of thinking, listening, and interacting are necessary for *transformational learning* that positively affects complex human interactions. HROs already know this and strive to perfect skills of communication, facilitation, and coaching.

HROs and the people in them continually learn, continually improve, mentor, and work together to excel. If you have ever been a part of one you automatically look for these characteristics in other organizations. If you have built an HRO in the past, you know it was likely one of the most worthwhile and satisfying endeavors you experienced.

Helping others to learn is more than a noble cause. Today it means survival. In a high-risk industry filled with dynamic uncertainty, it is imperative to do everything one can to *know how to think things through*. One person will eventually miss something, tire, misunderstand or become confused. We are human and fallible. Teams are better able to anticipate shortcomings, recognize biases, and see issues through to solution before they grow large. Critical thinking skills are required in addition to recognition-primed decision making. (Critical in the sense that it is a critically important thinking capacity, not finding fault.) Thinking through problems that were unimaginable and without precedent is part of developing the resiliency required to meet the challenges of our highly complex world.

HROs are learning organizations. What do they do? Is yours a learning organization? How can you lead learning? What do HROs know about developing critical thinking skills, teams and interpersonal relationships? The Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center worked with firefighters, incident management teams, small and large units in the USA and several other nations the last 9 years helping develop their own answers to these questions. Several organizations have built their own paths to high performance and high reliability. They have changed fundamental beliefs, realigned values, and created new behaviors once only imagined. They know they are safer and more productive. People want to work there; retention issues disappear. A renewed sense of purpose, who they are and what is possible, becomes the norm. Any organization can become a highly reliable organization.