

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

The 'Kiss' Principle: How To Create A Safety Strategy That Engages Your Workforce.

Strategy and Culture expert — Brett Rutledge, Sensemap

Creating and implementing a workplace road safety strategy can – and should – be simple. For it to work, those setting the strategy should be able to clearly explain its overall objective in one sentence, and those responsible for implementing it should understand their role in achieving the objective. This brief Thought Leadership piece outlines some key factors to consider, and follows a related piece focused on building a safety culture.

Keep it simple

Most strategies fail. And they fail because they are so complicated no-one can understand them, and because the objectives set are not achievable. But according to Business Linguist and Strategy expert **Brett Rutledge**, it doesn't have to be this way.

"Typically an organisation may have a five-year safety strategy but something will happen in year two, like a pandemic, that wasn't factored in or they just won't finish it all," he says.

"So do organisations take what they didn't finish and think 'this was all worth doing, we just got the timeframe wrong' and roll it into the next strategy? No, they abandon all that work and start again, and this is why people see a strategy in an organisation and roll their eyes."

Brett says another common reason strategies fail in organisations is that people tasked with creating them rush to communicate their objective without themselves understanding the purpose.

"We skip over the critical questions: What is it? Why does it matter? How does it work? If the people coming up with the strategy can't answer those questions, how is anyone else supposed to?"

"You want to change something, right? That will require a strategy. People think we're not big enough for a strategy, but just think of it as a plan of how we're going to get there.

"That plan of action needs a very clear objective and then we can drill down into whatever tasks are required to complete it.

"And remember, strategies aren't meant to be read, they're meant to be navigated. It should be simple and something I can immediately understand, and I should be able to easily find the bit that matters to me and how I can contribute (see breakout box).

"You're also going to require a certain way of working to do it – that's what a **culture** is. So if you don't take the time to grow the culture you need, and to figure out the plan you need, how are you going to make this change?

"Basically strategy is where you want the organisation to go and culture is the way you operate, and they work together. You can't have a plan without the people, and if the people don't have a plan, what are they doing?"

The starting point

Determining your overall safety “intent” is the first step in creating your organisation’s safety strategy. Begin by setting one safety objective for the next 12 months, Brett Rutledge suggests, and then break that down into the initiatives and tasks required to achieve it.

Following on from his [Growing A Strong Safety Culture](#) NRSP webinars in March, Brett, from NRSP Partner [Sensemap](#), will present the [Making Strategy Work](#) NRSP webinar in July to help guide organisations through developing and implementing an effective workplace road safety strategy.

“Most organisations aren’t clear what their intent is when it comes to workplace road safety, they don’t have that overarching goal or target that everyone is working towards,” he says.

“The way to think of an intent is ‘I don’t know how we’re going to get there but I believe we can’, and then every successive strategy is about moving you that little bit closer.

“As an example, let’s say our intent is zero crashes. Now what is the objective for this year? What are we going to do over the next 12 months to get us closer to that – not to achieve it because that’s not realistic, but how could we get closer?

“So set one objective you can realistically achieve in the next 12 months – and only one objective.

“If you set two or three objectives for me, human nature means I’m going to rank them and I’ll assume number one is more important than number three. Therefore number three is disposable, and that’s why you end up with strategies that don’t get finished.

“Then break that objective down into initiatives – here are the areas we have to do some work in to make that happen – and then break those initiatives down into tasks. So you’re drilling down so everyone can see how everything links to everything else.

“It’s simple, measurable and easy to follow.”

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‘Tell me my bit’: the D-Day landing and safety

“Think about Normandy, the D-Day landing. Pretty simple strategy. The Allies are going to make the Germans think we’re landing at Calais but we’re actually going to land at Normandy, establish a beachhead and then work our way inland and take a couple of key strategic towns. That’s it.

“Now there’s millions of logistics involved in the operational planning, but if I can sum up the D-Day strategy like that, there’s no reason every organisation can’t sum up their workplace road safety strategy just as quickly.

“So the first thing is I need to know what’s the intent, what are we trying to achieve?

“Every soldier knew that my objective was to get off the beach, get inland and establish a beachhead. So when they got onto the beach and found they hadn’t landed where they were supposed to or didn’t have the equipment they thought they did, they went ‘the plan we had isn’t going to work. I’m going to pivot and do something else to get there’.

“That’s why it worked – every soldier knew where they had to get to and they could come up with a new plan.

“Every person needs to know what their piece is but they don’t necessarily need to know the entire strategy. So when you’re talking about workers on the ground, it’s ‘how can you be safer?’ ‘What can you do to improve safety?’ ‘What can you do to move us closer to the objective?’

“That happens at the team meeting or toolbox talk. At the executive level, they might need to know the whole strategy but as it drills down you only need to know your bit.

“Too often what you see is organisations think everyone has to know the entire plan and every detail, but instead people just get overwhelmed.”

Communicating the message

Once an achievable goal has been set and broken down into tasks and responsibilities, Brett recommends considering how the strategy is communicated to the workforce.

For example, consider bringing middle managers 'up to speed' on the strategy so they can share it as part of a regular and engaging **Toolbox Talk** instead of a formal meeting where the strategy is presented by the Executive via PowerPoint slides.

It is critical, Brett says, that workers understand the role they play in contributing to achieving the objective without being immersed in detail about the strategy that has little relevance to them. The first outcome, Brett explains, motivates action while the second can have the opposite effect.

"Let's say the objective is we want to have a 10 per cent better safety record on the road. There you go, measurable. In the next 12 months, we think we can do that. Then you go 'that involves a number of initiatives, one might be to reduce speed. Okay, what are the tasks required to reduce speed?'

"One might be driver training, another might be around awareness, or engine limiting. So you're breaking it down into very practical things you can do.

"And when you get to communicating that with the guys on the ground – let's say about getting them to slow down, literally to take their foot off the accelerator a bit – then it's about telling a story. 'Did you hear about that guy from our competitor who rolled going through that roundabout?' And they all go 'yeah, yeah'. 'Do you know how that happened?' They'll go 'no'. And you tell the story about how your competitors have had rollovers because their drivers go through the roundabout too fast.

"Your drivers are not necessarily interested in slowing down simply for the sake of slowing down. Find what will motivate them to slow down."

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The strategy test – 5 questions to ask

- What is your overall safety intent?
- What is your objective for the next 12 months?
- What are our initiatives to make that happen?
- Who will be responsible for which tasks?
- How are we going to communicate our plan?



Click [here](#) to register for the Making Strategy Work webinar on July 20th, 2022.