

Can You Accomplish Your Mission Alone? Ask for Help When Needed

What is your mission in life and work, and in the control room? In the 1980s I taught from the “Life and Work” Sunday School curriculum and still like that phrase. My work mission, simply stated, is to help people learn and improve their performance so that operational excellence and pipeline safety are achieved – no errors, no spills, no leaks, no accidents.

I cannot accomplish that mission alone even if I do not like to ask for help. We need others in our life and work. Marcus Aurelius, the Roman emperor and Stoic, believed help was necessary to accomplish a mission.

Don't be ashamed to need help. Like a soldier storming a wall, you have a mission to accomplish. And if you've been wounded and you need a comrade to pull you up, so what?

I remember an Analyst, who had once been a Controller. He was adamant that he did not need any help when he was a Controller. I asked if he could do his work without any collaboration with SCADA personnel, field personnel, or other Control Center personnel. He insisted that he accomplished his tasks without assistance. That is ridiculous. Why is it difficult to admit we need help? There should be no shame in seeking a helping hand. Life and work wounds us all.

Pipeline Performance Group's mission is to “practice client-centered consulting that enhances operational safety, satisfies the goals of our clients for compliance and improved performance, assists the industry and regulators through education and lessons learned, and provides each of us personal satisfaction.” You can judge how well we accomplish that mission. I refer to those words often and we review our one page business plan regularly.

If I look at pipeline company websites or posters on a control center wall, I can find mission statements about operational excellence, safety, integrity, teamwork, and similar values. How do those company values become part of the mission of individuals? Do they? I encourage you to develop and implement a more worthy mission than just living a life that consists of getting up, surviving the day shift or night shift, and going to bed.

Let's apply these thoughts to our mission in control rooms and on pipelines. Every one of us ought to be connected to the same mission. But we divide into departments or so-called teams and then vie for the same resources. Sometimes this results in nastiness and cruel remarks. We try to go it alone and avoid working with others. We ought to be comrades instead of competitors.

Our mission ought to include helping rather than hindering. And we should be explicit in our intentions. It helps to write our intentions on an actual piece of paper, keep it close at hand, and look at it regularly. Our intentions should include our mission, our goals, and our values. Epictetus offers this advice that we should apply now.

It's time to stop being vague. If you wish to be an extraordinary person, if you wish to be wise, then you should explicitly identify the kind of person you aspire to become.

I know the kind of person I want to be. I know I need help. I am grateful for those who are willing to help me. I am willing to help those I can. Are you? Will you accomplish your mission? Will you ask for help and help others when needed?