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Is Your CRM Program Good or Bad?

Most of my time is spent doing Control Room Management (CRM) consulting, and thinking and writing about CRM issues in the hopes of helping improve CRM performance and not just CRM compliance. I do have a pleasurable pastime and that is going to music festivals and concerts. Those festivals and concerts are mostly bluegrass music. Most of it is sad, downhearted, pitiful music. At Merlefest, one of the entertainers made a remark after a song that echoed what Epictetus (c. 55 BC-135 AD) taught. The singer said, "The worse we make you feel, the better we have done our job."

We regularly do CRM program gap assessments, and I feel similarly to that bluegrass singer on some of those jobs. I can make people feel bad about their CRM Plan, even if that is not the goal. People sometimes feel sad and downhearted during the assessment and when they review the report. Epictetus has something to say that makes me feel a little better about the results of the gap assessments that we provide to those who are sad and downhearted.

> *If you wish to be good, first believe that you are bad.*

I have heard PHMSA representatives state the regulatory intent of the CRM rule. It is a positive, big picture goal. Every time I fill one notebook and begin another, I write these three elements in front of the new notebook so I can look at them regularly:

1. Create an environment to help assure controllers will be successful in maintaining pipeline safety and integrity.
2. Assure companies are addressing fatigue risks in the control room.
3. Verify that procedures, systems, and equipment are well thought out and function as designed.

We should keep that positive goal in front of us and in our thoughts as we ponder whether our CRM Program is good or bad. It should be the object of our efforts: the end in mind. One of the "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" (Stephen Covey) is "begin with the end in mind." He might have learned that from Seneca (c. 4 BC – 65 AD):

> *Let all your activity be directed to some object, let it have some end in view.*

We should continue with an end in mind in our ongoing CRM implementation activities. I think that is where programs sometimes fall short. We change the goal to "What is the least I can do to achieve regulatory compliance or to pass an audit?" That is not our goal, and I do not think it is a worthy goal. Our goal is Operational Excellence. What is yours?

I do not know whether your CRM Program is good or bad. We have great expectations when we review programs. Maybe that is why I make people feel bad. If it is any consolation, I feel worse about poor results of a gap assessment than you will. It is 2018, and CRM Programs have been in effect since 2011.   They ought to be good. I have to rely on what Marcus Aurelius (121 AD – 180 AD) said to remain strong, by adding the bracketed phrase.

> *You have power over your mind, not outside events [or what others do or do not do]. Realize this and you will find strength.*

Be good, keep the end in view, direct your activities, and use the mind to be strong.