

CRM and Philosophy: August 2021

Lessons Learned and Idea Sharing in the Control Room



Socrates once said, “*Strong minds discuss ideas, average minds discuss events, weak minds discuss people*”. I believe this can be easily applied to how we address lessons learned for everyday matters as well as to those more significant incidents related to Control Room Management and pipeline safety.

When an incident occurs, often times the first response is to point fingers in an attempt to place blame or deflect responsibility for the current situation. The talk might revolve around the Controller was distracted or was not adequately trained. It might even turn to more petty talk about how we never liked *that guy* anyway, or how she is too much of a social butterfly to be a good Controller. Does this discussion about people help solve problems? That’s a rhetorical question. Sure, some personal traits may contribute to workplace issues or incidents, but they are likely not the primary cause.

When an incident occurs, and we have moved past the blame game stage, we often spend time discussing the event itself. What happened? Why did it happen? How do we fix it? All of that is good and necessary. But ultimately it addresses just the hot topic of the moment. How does it help us to learn and grow?

True lessons learned come into play when we not only discuss issues and causes, but *IDEAS* for how to prevent those same issues and incidents from occurring again in the future. After the fires have been extinguished, gather the team to brainstorm new and fresh ideas or approaches. See what all of your team has to offer on the subject, think outside of the “management box”. The individuals on your team will take more responsibility for their pipeline operations if they feel engaged and invested in how they contribute to the larger picture.

Sharing ideas is an important process in any workplace. And while structure and procedures will always take the front seat in high-risk industries, such as airline and pipeline operations, continuously reviewing processes and procedures for more efficient and/or safe operations is key. In an article titled, *5 Steps You Can Implement to Encourage Idea Sharing at Work*¹, the author suggests the following:

- **Work Culture and Feedback** - The work culture has to support open lines of communication. If a company says it is open to feedback and suggestions, but management actions and responses contradict this, then a successful environment for idea sharing does not exist.
- **Don’t Limit Feedback and Idea Sharing Opportunities** – The opportunity to share ideas should extend beyond the annual performance review meeting or the monthly team meeting. Encourage managers and teammates to share ideas and collaborate on an as-needed basis.
- **Create Multiple Avenues** – Provide multiple methods for members of the team to offer feedback and ideas. Online systems, traditional suggestion boxes and structured brain-storming sessions are all reasonable options. Create multiple idea-sharing avenues so that all of the team members have a *safe* means to provide their input.
- **Reward Good Ideas, but Don’t Punish Bad Ones** – Some companies offer small rewards to those who offer ideas which can be, or are implemented. This may not work for all companies. And while good ideas should be acknowledged, it’s equally important to not put down those who offer poor suggestions.
- **Offer Anonymous Opportunities** – Many team members will freely share their ideas for improving processes or safety procedures, and some will be reluctant, but all of them have suggestions to share. Encouraging idea sharing is powerful and can help you identify problems before they become full-blown incidents.

Get beyond a culture that blames people. Take responsibility and see beyond individual events. Encourage idea sharing in the control room. Your people are your greatest resources. Encourage them to share, and then use their input.

¹ [5 Steps You Can Implement to Encourage Idea Sharing at Work](#) (2021). The Hire Talent.