



**By Kate Hamilton**  
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## Creating a Safety Culture

**E**very construction company is required to have a comprehensive safety program based on the regulations and standards dictated by OSHA, NIOSH, and a variety of industry associations. Creating the safety program in the first place may seem daunting, but it's the implementation that requires more attention and time to ensure that your employees follow through with the safety training.

Hendrik Van Breuk is the senior vice president of health safety and environment at Precipity, N.J.-based Skanska, an international commercial and residential construction company. Breuk focuses on creating a culture-based environment that inspires employees to make smart choices to encourage safer jobsites.

**KATE HAMILTON: Where do you start in creating a safety plan?**

**HENDRIK VAN BREUK:** The first thing you start with is seeing what your peer group is doing. Identify who has a safety plan in place and ask them what they're doing. Most companies are more than willing to share what they're doing. There's also a world of resources on the Internet. You can look at the OSHA site or use Google.

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### How do you train employees?

Implementation is the more difficult part. You do that through a certain level of training: starting with your supervisors and down to the employees. What we're seeing now is that people know the rules but there is a choice made to ignore those rules. That's the piece you need to aggressively enforce.

### How do you go about doing that?

It's how you inspire people to actually do the right thing. It's multidimensional. Your organization needs to be strategic. You need to look at basic knowledge (basically the technical training) and then you need to

look at how to inspire people to implement that training. You need to invest in people on a personal level, and ultimately what you want to create is a culture-based environment.

### What's the first step in a culture-based environment?

When leadership makes a statement, "No matter how a project performs successfully, we won't be successful until we're injury free," that sets the tone for how a company embraces safety. You also have leadership that constantly monitors, inspires, and corrects by delivering messages in a meaningful way. Safety managers, superintendents, and the people in leadership roles need to recognize that delegation is more than telling people what to do.

### How does your company create this environment?

We start every morning with a regimen of stretch-and-flex exercises that addresses accumulative trauma, prepares people mentally, and begins building relationships. Then all the crews break up into their groups and do precast planning where they identify their tasks and the hazards, and how to abate them.

### What do you see most when looking into accidents?

When I investigate accidents, often times the result is twofold: that it's a condition and there's a human factor. What you have to do is apply engineering controls—or make the hazard disappear by fixing it. In this industry, we often rely too much on "tie or die" slogans. The fundamental thing that is not done is effective precast planning.

### How can a construction company practically transition to a culture-based environment focused on safety?

Think of it this way—what gets measured, gets managed. If you only measure the accidents, you're really only measuring the number of failures. You have to look at more meaningful statistics that are performance based that will result in the end goal of being an injury-free day. If you begin to measure those activity-based things, then you'll build a framework of what builds a safe worksite. **CC**