



Business Leaders'
Health & Safety Forum

ZERO HARM WORKPLACES

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Changing a proud culture

Steve Carden Landcorp/Pāmu

A resource for leaders to use to support discussions with their teams and directors.



In October 2015 Landcorp/Pāmu experienced its third workplace fatality in six months. Not surprisingly, we went into crisis mode. We were desperate to stop anyone else dying. After much soul-searching, we came up with a plan to change the entrenched culture that was making our business unsafe. The plan focused on changing the way we thought and talked about health and safety, and how we managed risks.

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CEO Landcorp/Pāmu



When I took over as CEO in 2013, Landcorp/Pāmu appeared to be doing alright at health and safety. We had ACC tertiary accreditation, some of the best health and safety metrics in the industry, and we'd won awards for our health and safety programmes.

But as I travelled around the country talking to farmers on our 140 farms, I sensed an under-lying skepticism and resistance to our focus on health and safety. I got the feeling they considered it a bit of a side issue to the important business of improving production and performance.

All that changed in May 2015, when Landcorp/Pāmu experienced a workplace fatality – the first of three deaths that would occur over the next six months. Our organisation went into shock. We had failed our people and we had a crisis on our hands. As CEO, I felt ill-equipped to deal with the situation. I was terrified we could have another fatality and I wasn't going to be able to stop it.

Investigations into the fatalities showed all three could have been prevented – two of them if seatbelts had been worn. We realised we were facing a massive cultural issue – that we absolutely had to change attitudes towards health and safety in our corporate offices and on our farms. In particular, we had to challenge the belief among our people that injuries are an unavoidable part of farming – and that people who get hurt are just unlucky.

We needed health and safety to stop being seen as a side issue, and to become the way we worked. Changing an entrenched culture in an industry like agriculture was no small challenge. But with the help of Australian health and safety consultancy, Wilson Consulting, we came up with a six-part plan to do this.

■ Changing a proud culture

Tactic 1: Make health and safety mean something

We felt that as an organisation we were trying to shield ourselves from the reality of what had happened. For example, people tended to refer to the fatalities by their location – rather than using the names of the victims. So we decided to personalise health and safety – to impress on everyone the impact our health and safety performance was having on our people and their families.

I put together a presentation, which I did to the board and then to farmers around the country, where I talked about the people who had died, exactly what happened and the impact on their families. I wanted everyone to realise that all these accidents happened when people were doing ordinary tasks that occur on farms every day. Everyone was exposed to these risks – and their consequences.

We also took this approach at our leaders' conference, where we ran an exercise to demonstrate the scale of harm occurring. Each of the 300 managers had a letter under their seat telling them what had 'happened' to them at work that day. These outcomes were based on our health and safety performance in a typical year. Nearly 140 managers got letters saying they'd needed medical treatment for an injury; 93 were badly injured; 14 were so seriously injured we'd had to tell WorkSafe and one person 'died'.

Everyone who'd been 'killed' or 'hurt' was asked to stand up – which turned out to be 245 out of 300 managers in the room. Seeing all these 'injured' people standing together had a very powerful impact. It brought home the human burden being created by our poor health and safety performance. And it helped them understand why we needed to do better.



Tactic 2: Ensure the staff own health and safety

Farmers work in dynamic environments – meaning a compliance-based approach to health and safety was never going to work for them. We could never write enough rules to cover all the situations they face in an ordinary day. Instead we decided to give our farmers the skills they needed to be able to proactively manage dynamic risks on the go.

We developed a training programme for our farmers that focused on how to do good risk assessments, incident investigations, safety observations and safety conversations. The goal was to change the mind-set that health and safety was about compliance and documentation, to it being about having good conversations to make sure risks are being managed right.

Feedback about this training from farmers has been hugely positive. Encouragingly, lots of the comments have been about how the skills they're learning can be applied to any decision-making process – not just risk management.

Now in staff rooms across our farms you'll see 'bow-tie' risk assessments that the team have drawn up at their morning meeting as they plan their work for the day. That's very encouraging.

Tactic 3: Focus on critical risks

We realised that our previous efforts to focus on everything in health and safety had reduced our impact and overwhelmed our people. So, we made a strategic decision to focus on the eight critical risks that our data tells us causes 78% of the harm on our farms.

We've looked at how we can control these risks – what's working, what's not and where controls aren't yet in place. That's helped us put together a long-term strategy for health and safety.

Now we know where we need to invest over time to improve controls and reduce injuries.

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■ How to use this case study

Use this case study to support conversations within your organisation about health and safety culture. In addition to reading this case study you can watch a short video (www.zeroharm.org.nz/leadership/case-studies/landcorp/), then invite people to discuss:

- » How can we make sure H&S 'means something' to everyone here?
- » What skills or resources do our people need so they can take ownership of H&S?
- » What are our critical risks? How well do we focus on them?
- » How can we get our people more involved in our H&S initiatives?
- » Do we maintain a 'sense of vulnerability' – or have we become complacent about our risks?
- » Are there opportunities to work with others to lift our industry's H&S performance?

Tactic 4: Implement from the ground up

We knew our health and safety initiatives would only succeed if they were supported by farmers. Experience had taught us that a top-down approach won't work with them.

With that in mind, we set up our Safety Forum – a group of 26 farmers from across the country who guide the development of our health and safety strategy, policies and initiatives. The group also acts as champions for these initiatives.

For example, the Forum helped draft our health and safety expectations, helped pick our personal protective equipment, and took the lead in writing our *Kids on Farms* policy. This has given farmers a voice in the development process, and made sure that any decisions or initiatives are workable for farmers. Having the Safety Forum front the roll-out of new initiatives also means we've got farmers talking to farmers – a much more effective way to get the messages across. This has helped reduce farmer resistance to introducing safer work practices.

Tactic 5: Maintain the sense of vulnerability

Our intense focus on improving health and safety resulted in quick gains. Soon I began to hear comments around head office that we had this health and safety thing sorted, so it was time to get back to our real work of improving performance and the financials. This was concerning to me because we are still having serious accidents. We don't have health and safety sorted at all and I am far from sleeping easy at night.

I realised my role as CEO was to maintain a sense of vulnerability around health and safety – and to maintain the focus long-term. I've had to be very clear with our managers that health and safety is not a two or three-year project for us. It's part of how we operate forever. If people are sick of hearing about health and safety then they are sick of hearing about how we operate.

Tactic 6: Build a coalition of the willing

It was clear to me that we were going to struggle to change the culture in our organisation if the culture within our industry stayed the same. High rates of injury occur right across New Zealand's agriculture sector. And there was an opportunity for Landcorp/Pāmu – as a major player in the industry – to take on a convening role and bring together other leaders who want to bring about change.

This led to the creation in November 2016 of the Agricultural Leaders' Health and Safety Action Group, which involves organisations such as LIC, Ngāi Tahu Farming, AsureQuality, Ravensdown, Ballance Agri-Nutrients, and Fonterra. ACC and WorkSafe are also supporting the group, which aims to get industry leaders working together to improve health and safety in agriculture.

■ The outcome

Nearly two years into our new health and safety programme I'm pleased to say that injuries are trending down and attitudes towards health and safety are shifting. We still have a long way to go. But there are encouraging signs of progress.

One marker of success for us was to get people talking about health and safety in the same way they talk about other aspects of farming – for it to just be an ordinary part of the job. We've definitely achieved that. When I go onto farms now it's really easy to strike up a conversation about health and safety. In fact, farmers and their teams will initiate them.

It's intangible things like that which tell me the culture is starting to change. I know it takes a long time to alter entrenched attitudes and get an organisation thinking differently. But I'm completely confident that if we maintain the focus we have, we will absolutely get the change that we need to see.

Leaders make a difference

The Business Leaders' Health and Safety Forum inspires and supports its members to become more effective leaders on health and safety.

The Forum has about 300 members, who are CEOs or Managing Directors of significant New Zealand companies.

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