

# BEST SECRETS BEHIND SUCCESSFUL SAFETY PROGRAMS FOR PLANT MANAGERS

*Simple Safety Steps to Decrease Risk and  
Increase Productivity in Your Plant*



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# INTRODUCTION

Are you facing ongoing safety challenges inside your plant? Are you striving to build a positive safety culture? Or perhaps you want to be more proactive in enhancing your safety programs?

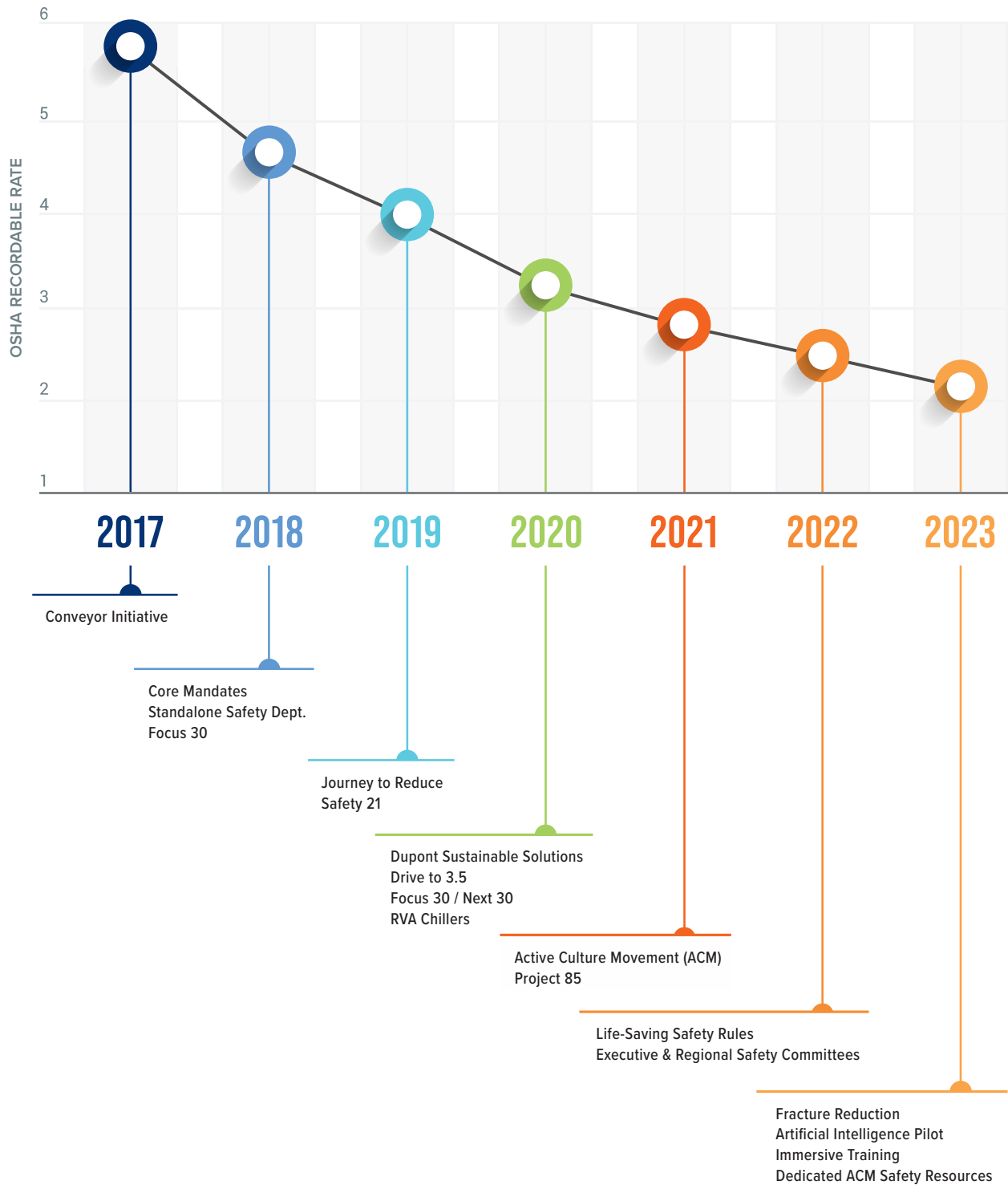
Whatever the reason, we're glad you're here.

At Fortrex, we believe that 'Safety is No Secret.' Promoting safety is a collaborative effort across our industry. We all face unique challenges related to the nature of our work around dangerous equipment and in vulnerable environments. Safety is the one area where we should all be united by learning and sharing best practices with each other.

The purpose of this whitepaper is to share some of our own experiences and insights into what has worked for our team at Fortrex in building a more effective safety program and lowering OSHA recordables. We hope this will help you as well in your role.



# FORTREX SAFETY JOURNEY





# BACKGROUND

Over the last 25 years, our team at Fortrex has dedicated itself to being one of the industry's largest food safety and contract sanitation providers. We have led initiatives in Food Safety, Technical Services, and Safety, with a strong commitment to protecting the health and safety of thousands of sanitation employees across the U.S. and Canada. This responsibility is taken very seriously.

Safety is the foundational core value and our guiding principle behind everything we do at Fortrex. However, it's been a journey to get to where we are today. Candidly, we struggled in the past with frequent accidents and injuries that lead to a higher number of OSHA recordables and inefficiencies in our work.

From organizational structure to culture to technology changes, we've worked diligently to change how safety is valued and managed at every level of our organization. And as a result, we have successfully decreased our OSHA recordables by more than 67 percent\*.

These are the six most impactful lessons we learned as part of our journey...

1. CULTURE
2. TRAINING
3. GOALS
4. DATA
5. DESIGN
6. CELEBRATION



\*Fortrex data from 2017-2023.



# CULTURE

## MAKE SAFETY PART OF YOUR COMPANY'S CORE VALUES & CULTURE

Culture is one of the most important aspects of safety success that is often overlooked or mistaken. We hear from companies all the time who are struggling with safety issues, despite 'prioritizing' safety and dedicating a significant amount of time, money and resources into developing procedures, protocols, and training programs.

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### PRIORITY

A priority is something that changes due to outside influences and demands.

### VALUE

A person's principles or standards of behavior; one's judgment of what is important in life.  
A value is something that influences cannot change.

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- **Culture change starts at the executive level. Period.** You must have 100 percent agreement that safety will always come first, even above business priorities and efficiency. When employees know safety is valued at the top level, they will begin to value it in the same way. To emphasize this, consider incorporating a theme of safety into your company's core values or vision statement.
- **It's important to understand the difference between a priority vs. a value.** Priorities are something that will shift due to a variety of influences or demands, whereas a value is something that guides someone's behavior. If we don't value our safety as individuals, then we probably aren't as likely to respond to the guidance being set forth by others trying to protect you.

This was a very important learning for our leadership team and has significantly changed the way we approach the subject of safety and many other areas in our business. We had to find new ways to communicate and encourage the value of safety to our employees more effectively.

From training to marketing to operations, we implemented programs and new messaging to help more effectively engage and communicate with employees. Sometimes all it takes is hearing a story that reminds you why you should value your safety more which may force you to make better decisions in the future. Or being reminded about your family or someone that cares deeply about you and your safety.



“ Safety is the most important thing to focus on as without it we can’t accomplish anything in the long run. ”

Fortrex In-Plant Safety Manager



- **Consider your organizational structure and establishing a standalone safety department with clearly defined duties, roles, and tasks.** This allows leaders to be more focused on core competency and goals. Our team has also seen great value in establishing our own Internal Executive Safety Committee that meets monthly to share best practices and govern safety initiatives to further drive our safety culture. This includes cross-functional executive team members to bring different perspectives.
- **Identify or designate subject matter experts across a variety of impactful safety topics.** These might include legal, compliance, technology, equipment, PPE, etc. Leaning on the leadership and education they can bring to the table can be a huge asset.



“ The most rewarding part about my job is being a leader for my team and instilling the core value of safety into everything we do. ”

Fortrex In-Plant Safety Manager



# TRAINING

## PRIORITIZE TRAINING & COACHING OVERSIGHT

Safety starts by having engaging hiring processes, on-boarding and on-going training. Employees that have the right kind of training and coaching to make them feel supported and prepared are not only more likely to avoid injury but will likely stay in their role significantly longer. And with more experience, they can be more effective and efficient in the work they do. It's a win-win.

- **Consistency is key.** We highly recommend researching what the best management system is for a consistent training program, if you haven't already. We found great success in streamlining all of our training into a standardized Learning Management System (LMS). This allows us to better monitor progress and performance over time for every employee, as well as easily adjust or incorporate new training programs to deliver across the organization.
- **Double-down on the first 30-days of on-boarding with a new employee.** It is a critical time for setting a standard. Consider assigning a full-time trainer to work side by side with every new employee for the first 3-4 weeks.
- **Use data to guide training materials.** Gather and monitor data related to accidents to update your training programs frequently. The more specific and up to date your training is, the better. Also consider tailoring the training with specific information based on equipment or environmental risks at certain locations.
- **Dive deeper with immersive training.** Use the data you gather to define specific problem areas or topics to develop more in-depth training. Our team has started spending a whole month focusing on one targeted topic, during our nightly toolbox talks with our frontline employees. This approach allows you to better focus and make an impactful change in decreasing risk.
- **Avoid complacency.** Complacency among legacy employees is extremely risky. Make sure to keep them engaged in on-going training programs. Training reminders are a great way to keep mindsets fresh to avoid complacent injuries. It is also important during a shift to build in regular team meetings or breaks to regroup and make sure everyone is in the right mindset.



- **Stay positive.** A ‘gotcha’ punishment approach to training and coaching is not necessarily the most effective way to keep employees safe unless it is an on-going safety issue with an employee. We find it to be most effective to focus on the positive and be proactive in finding things employees are doing right to recognize them. Positive reinforcement encourages employees to want to do better and builds trust among the entire team.
- **Take field trips.** Encourage your managers and supervisors to take regular field-trips around the plants to identify, discuss and come up with solutions for safety hazards.

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**Complacency among legacy employees is extremely risky. Make sure to keep them engaged in on-going training programs.**

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WHAT'S MISSING?  
Answer: We are all the **who**.



# GOALS

## SET CLEAR MEASURABLE GOALS & MONITOR CONSISTENTLY

Safety is about the specifics. If you really want to create change, you have to dissect it down to a cause and find the specific areas where you believe you can have the greatest impact.

The problem many companies make is trying to attack safety as a whole and focusing on too many areas all at once, which leads to confusion and unalignment. It makes it difficult to be able to know what to track, when to track it and how to respond to it.

In our case, we first identified that the most important Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that our team wanted to track. These included:

- ▶ OSHA Recordables
- ▶ Lost time
- ▶ Serious Injury Fracture (SIF)
- ▶ Fractures

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**According to OSHA, about 21% of all recordable events have the potential to lead to serious injuries and fatalities. Knowing how to identify SIF potentials will help reduce life-altering injuries.**

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We used these KPIs as our starting point to begin collecting and analyzing data to look at information related to specific injuries - what happened, what caused it, where did it happen, etc. This information helped guide our planning around how and where we needed to act first. We also assigned a team to monitor our performance in these key areas over time to ensure our changes or adjustments were working.

Another key differentiator in safety is figuring out a way to be proactive and understanding the difference between a leading vs. lagging indicators. Leading indicators help us to get ahead of issues before they happen, whereas lagging indicators look back at whether the intended result was achieved. Figure out a way to identify key leading indicators in your plant. Two examples of our leading indicators we use are **Hazard Recognition** where our leadership team walks plants to look for potential hazards and **Routine Safety Assessments** that are performed quarterly in our plants where our teams are scored on safety performance.



# DATA

## IDENTIFY STRATEGIC DATA OR TECHNOLOGIES TO ENHANCE SAFETY PROGRAMS

We understand that technology can sometimes feel overwhelming. With numerous solutions being pitched to us regularly, it can be challenging to determine where to invest and what will have the greatest impact on our business.

However, we firmly believe that technology can be a significant asset to advancing safety in our industry. Here are a few key areas where we have seen the greatest impact and where we foresee continued advancements in the future.

### TRAINING

As mentioned above, consistency is key when it comes to training. Technology, like a sophisticated Learning Management System (LMS), can help simplify and streamline the training process. It supports consistent delivery and ability to monitor progress and performance over time. It also allows you to adjust information more easily as part of your Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) over time to avoid outdated training information.

### REMOTE VIDEO AUDITING (RVA)

We have started using RVA as additional set of eyes on our floor. It is a program that monitors and measures behaviors to provide optimal safety performance feedback. Cameras installed in the plant are monitored by a third-party audit center as they review all videos weekly and look for motion or activity that goes against the safety SOPs that were created for high bench cleaning. Any activity that does not match the SOP for high-risk equipment, such as Lock Out Tag Out (LOTO) opportunities, improper movement, unsafe positioning or fall protection PPE is not present, is flagged and a video clip of the coaching opportunity is sent to a Site Manager. That footage is then used as an opportunity to coach and train on proper safety behaviors. Being able to visually show the sanitor their observed behavior helps them see, learn, and understand what they need to correct to work safer. While this isn't necessarily information we can use in real-time right now, we are hopeful it will move toward that in the future.

### ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

New and emerging AI technology can benefit an organization by improving the overall safety program by reducing human errors and providing real time feedback to the employees. This will continue to help identify risks, and behaviors.



**“ Using data to breakdown safety into actionable initiatives has been a game changer. When our team members are focused on a goal, they look out for each other and motivate each other to work smarter. ”**

Divisional Safety Manager, Fortrex



# DESIGN

## PARTNER WITH VENDORS TO ADVANCE SAFETY DESIGN

Sometimes there are elements of safety around your plant that are not necessarily in your control, but that pose significant risk to your employees. Don't be afraid to reach out to your partners to share insight and ask for help in creating safety solutions.

### EQUIPMENT DESIGN

Food processing machines and systems that are used to handle, prepare, cook, store, and package food are inherently dangerous. They are not always designed with safety in mind and can be the result of catastrophic injuries if employees are not trained properly. It's important to form relationships and work together with equipment manufacturers to share feedback and insight related to safety concerns. Many times, they will work together to help come up with solutions.

### PLANT DESIGN

Everyone looks through a different lens at times. When designing or re-designing a plant, it is critical to have a safety representative as part of the planning process. Something as simple as drain design, locations of water hose drops, or where LOTO disconnects are located can significantly impact safety throughout the plant. Having a safety subject matter expert who understands the process along with being supported by a cross functional team during the design/redesign will go a long way.

### PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

PPE has come a long way in the last few years. We believe that quality PPE can play a significant role in enhancing safety. You want employees to feel confident and comfortable in the protection they wear, including goggles, gloves, boots, etc., so they are not distracted during a shift. Our team at Fortrex partnered with a specific PPE vendor to design custom rainsuits and rainboots with better traction for the wet environments we work in. Our employees take pride in good equipment, and we've also seen a significant benefit from a safety perspective.





# CELEBRATION

## WHAT'S ALL THIS HARD WORK FOR WITHOUT A LITTLE FUN? CELEBRATE SUCCESS.

Celebration is absolutely one of the most game-changing tactics you should make sure to include in your safety strategy. Employees want to be recognized for something they are doing well and helping to achieve goals. This not only keeps them focused on the goals by providing incentives and recognition, but it also helps to build culture and camaraderie as a team.

Our team at Fortrex incorporated 30-, 60-, and 90-day celebration milestones as part of our Safety Playbook for our site managers. This includes accident-free boards that we have in every single plant we service. The team changes the numbers together on a regular basis to celebrate the successful milestones and they determine a celebration reward, including food, prize, games, or activities.

We also have core value safety callouts as part of our leadership meetings on a regular basis where an employee is selected and recognized for their commitment to safety values. We promote these employees as part of our internal company newsletter as well.

Talk with your team and determine the right strategies to start celebrating even the smallest of successes. We promise it will be worth it and drive long-term change over time.



# CONCLUSION

Congratulations on being committed to learning. It is truly the first step to making positive change. If you are still reading this far, we hope you are walking away with at least a few ideas to consider when looking at the future of your safety strategy.

Safety is complicated and there are a lot of different factors to consider based on your own situation. If you start small, set goals, and stay committed, BIG things can happen overtime. You must find what works best for you and your team to build a positive, safety culture.

Just remember that it is simply not enough to prioritize safety – your employees have to value it.

***Good luck. We wish you the very best in your safety journey.***



Fortrex is the first line of defense in food safety. The company is a leading provider of sanitation solutions in North America, offering tech-forward innovation to drive growth by helping our customers identify and avoid preventable issues while delivering real-time results. We offer cost-effective solutions to our customers, while providing the highest-level of contaminant defense. Fortrex's team of skilled food sanitors, microbiologists, technical experts and engineers are committed to keeping USDA, FDA, and CFIA processing facilities clean, safe, and audit-ready.

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For more information or to schedule a free plant sanitation assessment visit [www.FortrexSolutions.com](http://www.FortrexSolutions.com).

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