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COVER STORY:

## SAFETY FIRST

Tracy Lawson views safety  
as a tool for efficiency, not  
just compliance



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# Think Safety First for Your Bottom Line, Not Just Compliance

## Switching mindset towards 'safe-production' is the key to workplace efficiency

**T**racy Lawson, who heads Hawaii's largest safety consulting firm, said it's time for businesses to focus on workplace safety as a tool for efficiency, rather than just compliance.

Lawson, who has worked with UC San Diego Extension's OSHA Training Institute Education Center (OTIEC) for more than a dozen years, said some businesses still see safety as simply a cost-of-doing business.

"For too long safety has been looked at from a compliance only perspective," said Lawson, who is founder and president of Lawson & Associates, Inc. "If businesses would shift old mindsets toward 'safe-production' they would realize the integration of safety into the operational process is the key to efficiency, and efficient businesses are profitable."

When organizations purposefully and strategically integrate a safety management system into their daily operations, Lawson said, "the results are dramatic."

Lawson knows from where of she speaks. In the early 1990s, after a four-year hitch in the Army, she joined her father's construction company. It was a trial by fire. She was put in charge of safety just as the company was facing the threat of losing its insurance because it had so many workplace accidents.

"Each year for the next three years we cut accidents in half," Lawson said. "And through it all, I developed a passion for safety and realized that we don't have to choose between working safely and being profitable. We can do both."

She went to school at night while work-

ing and earned a degree in occupational safety and environmental management. In 1995, she got a job with a construction company that had operations locally in Hawaii and across the nation. Over the next dozen years she rose up the ranks until she was corporate vice president for safety, traveling the world managing the safety programs on large construction projects.

In the mid-2000s Lawson became

an independent consultant and started working with OTIEC and began offering businesses in Hawaii high-level safety training.

"I have worked very hard to have a good reputation as a quality safety professional - I found that same quality at UC San Diego Extension," Lawson said. "UC San Diego is a quality organization and people there care deeply about what they do. Passionate, knowledgeable local safety professionals supporting UC San Diego here in Hawaii are a great benefit for the local community."

In 2009, she launched Lawson & Associates, which now employs 15 people and is working on some of Hawaii's largest and most complex projects. Their most notable contract is working as the Safety



Tracy Lawson is the founder and President of one of Hawaii's largest safety consulting firms, Lawson & Associates, Inc.



& Security Support Consultant for the Honolulu Authority on the Rapid Transportation Honolulu Rail Transit project. The project is a 20-mile, elevated light rail system, the first of its kind in Hawaii.

Lawson & Associates specializes in construction and general industry, which means that in addition to the rail project, Lawson works with companies of all sizes to address their individual safety needs, including writing safety programs, conducting audits and performing training. Clients include the hotel industry, facility maintenance groups for schools and public and private businesses.

Lawson emphasized the importance of what she calls “safety economics,” which is integrating safety into the daily operational planning and work flow processes. A barrier to safety that she sees in many companies is how the implementation of safety competes with production rather than complementing it.

She often quotes legendary management consultant W. Edwards Deming: “Funny how we don’t have the time to improve, but we have plenty of time to perform work inefficiently and to resolve the same problems over and over.”

Even in today’s environment, Lawson said too many job sites are filled with workers who learned how to do their job without any formal training, which she calls the “sink-or-swim method.” Companies can eliminate waste, improve production and facilitate a strong safety culture by having a well-trained workforce.


“Why would you want to pay for accidents? Why would you want to spend money on losses?” Lawson said. “It’s all about a healthy, educated workforce producing efficiently, which absolutely means safely producing.”

Lawson said the old approach, implementing safety programs that are compliance-only based, is fueling a natural conflict between production and safety. “If safety gets in the way of doing business, then people aren’t going to pay as much attention to it,” Lawson said. “Protecting people does not have to be sacrificed for production.”

A big part of achieving this safe production mindset is quality safety training for employees. Management and employees need to know what the requirements are and why it is important to them. Training needs to be engaging and relevant.

Lawson said that for companies to get the most value out of their training efforts, they need to plan and budget for quality training and measure changes in behavior.

“When we know better, we do better,” she said.



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