

Union Pacific's St. Louis Service Unit Ignores Principles of Safety Program

by Ed Michael

The arbitrary discipline policy of the St Louis Service Unit which finds employees responsible for things outside their control flies in the face of the principles of the Union Pacific "Total Safety Culture" (TSC) program. Service unit management insists on disciplining train and engine employees for incidents that occur outside their control and/or for which they have no responsibility.

"Total Safety Culture" is a behavior modification safety program which the UP has spent an untold amount of money in purchasing and implementing. The UP has spent a lot of money to send every employee to a one-day TSC class. They readily admit that past efforts at building safety programs have had a lot of "baggage" and mixed results. Those, such as FTX, (Field Training Exercise) have morphed into what is now used as a gauge of managers' actions to force rules compliance by assessing discipline.

On the St Louis Service Unit, local managers are disciplining employees for actions not under their control. These discipline decisions are diametrically opposed to the tenets of the Total Safety Culture program.

What does TSC have to say about such situations? *The TSC training presentation says:*

Hold People Accountable for Things *Within* Their Control

When individuals are *held* accountable for things outside their control:

- **Motivation is decreased (Consequences are uncertain)**
- **Personal (Dis)stress is increased**

In a concluding list of questions meant as a review, we find this question which obviously is supposed to be answered "false".

3. Total Safety Culture holds people accountable for things outside their control. A. True B. False

Union Pacific's upper management has, in the past, proclaimed a complete, unequivocal commitment to the values of the Total Safety Culture program. But as we have often seen, as these programs are implemented by local management to employees on the job, the commitment becomes one of just lip service. Actual local conditions remain the same or may even deteriorate.

It is a shame to stand by and watch as all those resources spent on Total Safety Culture are wasted. The real shame is that they could have been employed in making truly beneficial changes in employee safety.

Towards the close of the TSC presentation, we find this "description" of Total Safety Culture:

Total Safety Culture - Employee Owned and Driven

- **Builds Trust**
- **Accountability**
- **Mutual Respect**

UP management bought and paid for this program. It is unfortunate that management mocks such noble proclamations. Actions truly speak louder than words.

Total Safety Culture – like all Behavior Based Safety programs that blame the worker rather than focusing on hazards – is a sham. TSC employs the rhetoric of labor-management cooperation, union participation, and worker empowerment. But like all other BBS programs, once implemented TSC is just one more "safety program" created and driven by management that places full responsibility for all accidents and all injuries upon employees, even those that are completely outside of their control.