

The Human Side of Contractor Safety

Building Trust, Partnership, and Shared Learning

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What We'll Cover Today

Session Objectives

01

Where We Are

Understand the current state of contractor safety management

02

HOP Thinking

See how Human and Organizational Performance principles can help

03

A Simple Framework

Introduce a collaboration model that drives deeper partnership

04

Your Call to Action

Leave with something concrete you can do where you work



The Contractor Challenge

Multiple Employers

Different cultures, incentives, and schedule pressures

High-Risk & Specialty Work

Tasks that demand expertise

Productivity pressure

Schedule and output demands are high, silently competing with safety

Power Differentials

Authority gaps decide whether a worker speaks up



Where Contractor Safety Is Now

Compliance-Based Systems

Safety managed through grading, rules, audits, and checklists

Lagging Metrics

We measure what already went wrong,
not what's about to

Paperwork Overload

Administrative burden crowds out meaningful safety conversations

The Problem



Good Programs Aren't Enough

Programs without connection and trust fail to create true safety



SIF Events in 2024

Multiple serious injury and fatality events occurred despite strong programs



Information Gaps

Lessons learned from events are not consistently shared across organizations



Trust & Authority Gaps

Power differentials silence contractors who see risk but don't feel safe speaking up

Challenger: A Contractor Safety Lesson

January 28, 1986. A contractor's engineers warned about O-ring failure in the cold. Their “do not launch” recommendation was reversed. (Rogers Commission, 1986)

Information Gap

Critical warnings did not flow up the decision chain

Power Differential

Engineers felt pressure to approve despite their own data

Trust Failure

The client-contractor relationship did not support honest dialogue



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HOP PRINCIPLES

Human & Organizational Performance

People Make Mistakes

Error is normal, systems must be designed to absorb it

Blame Fixes Nothing

Punishing individuals doesn't prevent the next event

Context Drives Behavior

The conditions workers face shape every decision they make

Learning Is Vital

Organizations that learn from events build resilience over time

Leadership's Response Matters

How leaders react to failure determines whether workers speak up next time

(Conklin, 2012)



How HOP Improves Contractor Safety

HOP isn't just an initiative. It's a way of thinking and it changes how we plan, lead, visit, and learn.

HOP in Action



Planning & Pre-Job Briefs

Involve contractors in hazard identification. Ask: "What's different about this job today?"



Field Visits & Leadership Presence

Leaders who show up to listen, not inspect, build the trust that surfaces real risk



Learning With Contractors

Shift from blame to understanding. Ask: "How can we help?"



Leadership Decision-Making

HOP-informed leaders ask "what conditions allowed this?" before drawing conclusions

Psychological Safety in Contractor Relationships

The shared belief that it's safe to speak up, report a hazard, or admit a mistake, without fear.

Google's Project Aristotle identified psychological safety as a key dynamic of effective teams. Edmondson's research linked psychological safety with learning behaviors such as discussing errors, asking questions, and seeking feedback. (Rozovsky, 2015; Edmondson, 1999)



Increased Near-Miss Reporting



Honest Communication



Reduced Blame Culture



Stronger Client-Contractor Trust



Better Learning From Events

> **"The key to helping is to ask rather than tell. To be curious rather than certain."**
> **Edgar Schein. Curiosity opens doors that authority closes. (Schein & Schein, 2013)**

THE FRAMEWORK

A Contractor Safety Collaboration Model

Built from the ground up to break down silos, share learning, and prevent serious injuries, together.

Outreach

Personal calls and one-on-one conversations

Build the Space

Optional peer-led meetings by unit

Sustain & Expand

Share learnings and replicate broadly



The model is simple by design because trust is built in small, consistent actions, not grand programs.



Step 1: Start With a Phone Call

Every core contractor got a direct call, not a memo, not an email blast. The message was simple: we weren’t sharing enough, and we needed to change that.

One-on-One First

Build individual trust before bringing the group together

Be Transparent

Name the gap clearly, information isn't flowing and we need to fix that

Make It Optional

Voluntary participation signals this is collaboration, not compliance

Step 2: Create the Space

Power Line Safety Reps

Monthly collaboration meetings with high attendance, active sharing

Tree Trimming & Civil Construction

Separate meetings for each part of the business tailored to each group's context

Power Line Operations Personnel

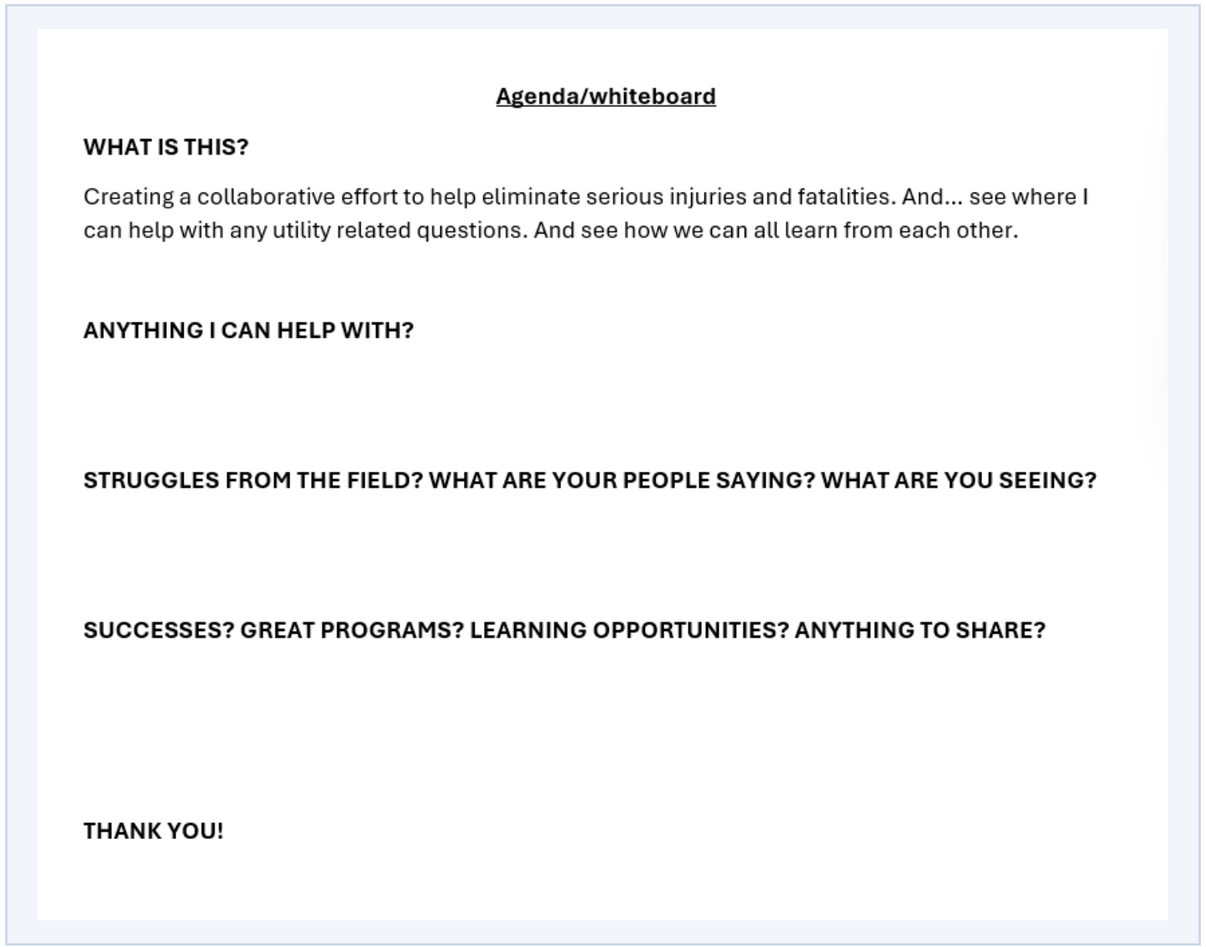
Quarterly meeting expanded to include superintendents and operations managers

The Format That Made It Work

Meetings were **contractor-led and peer-driven**. The facilitator's role was to hold the space, not direct the conversation.

- Focus on collaboration, not compliance
- Safe environment for honest dialogue
- SCE shared data and insights
- No information used against any contractor

The Agenda That Started Every Meeting



Agenda/whiteboard

WHAT IS THIS?

Creating a collaborative effort to help eliminate serious injuries and fatalities. And… see where I can help with any utility related questions. And see how we can all learn from each other.

ANYTHING I CAN HELP WITH?

STRUGGLES FROM THE FIELD? WHAT ARE YOUR PEOPLE SAYING? WHAT ARE YOU SEEING?

SUCCESSES? GREAT PROGRAMS? LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES? ANYTHING TO SHARE?

THANK YOU!

What Happened When People Gathered

> "These are some of the most valuable meetings I've attended. It feels like a true partnership."
> Contractor Representative

100%

Power Line Contractors

Every source power line contractor at operations meeting

3

Parts of the Business

Power line, tree trimming, and civil construction

3+

Targeted Collaborations

Underground marking, event reporting, helicopter sessions



Targeted Collaborations That Moved the Needle

Utility Marking Crews & Digging Crews

Addressed communication gaps between the crews who mark buried lines and the crews who dig.

Event Reporting Contractor Collaboration

Direct Q&A between the Edison reporting team and all source contractors, improved system understanding and usage

Line Crews & Helicopter Crews

Scheduled as a direct action item from a power line operations collaboration bringing helicopter and power line contractors together to address shared safety concerns

Who works alongside each other in your world?



Helicopter and Line Contractor Collaboration

Relationships Came First

Pilots, ground crews, and line crews met as peers, not as companies.

Learning Moved Both Ways

Helicopter work training, job walks, rigging, and human external cargo practices, shared openly. No gatekeeping.

The Work Got Better

Shared best practices, agreed frequencies, all-party tailboards. Fewer surprises.

The contractors asked to continue meeting. That was one of the clearest signs the collaboration was creating value.

Learning Spreading in Real Time

From One Contractor to Many

After an underground vault arc flash, one contractor introduced thermal imaging alongside heat scanning. The following month, another contractor reported adopting the same practice.

Near miss and good catch program ideas have been shared and implemented across multiple organizations.

Training programs shared, truck camera plans, circle of safety ideas, and so much more

Safety is not a competition. Nobody wins when someone gets hurt.



The Biggest Barrier: Trust



How Trust Was Built

- Made clear: nothing shared would ever be used against a contractor
- Initial meetings held with only one SCE representative present
- Actively listened, took notes, and followed up with action
- Responded to contractor feedback with research and follow up

The relationships that formed are the most significant outcome.

Making It the New Normal

1

Bring Others In

Two additional Safety Advisors have joined. This ensures continuity and replication

2

Share Upward

Presented at multiple Safety Leadership meetings

3

Expand the Model

Exploring other operating units and targeted collaborations

The key to scaling: **start with intentional outreach**. Make the phone calls. Initiate the conversations. Build the trust. The rest follows.

Key Takeaways

Collaboration Fuels Progress

Open dialogue produces field-driven solutions that programs alone cannot deliver. Relationships matter.

Peer Learning Is Powerful

Contractors adopt practices far more readily when they come from peers facing the same conditions.

Culture Change Is Measurable

Participation, shared ownership, and cross-adoption of good practice are real indicators of progress.

Safety Isn’t a Competition

Owners, clients, and contractors all want the same thing. Working together, not against each other, is what moves it.

Nobody wins when someone gets hurt.

Your Call to Action

You don't need a formal program. You need a phone call and the courage to start.



If You're an Owner or Client

Make the call. Create the space. Make it safe to be honest.



If You're a Contractor

Ask your client to lead it. If they're not ready, start it yourself.

The goal is simple: work together to prevent serious injuries and fatalities. That work starts with you, today.

Thank you

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CITATIONS

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