

UNB OHS Central Interview (Friday, January 8, 2016)

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1. How many years' experience do you currently have in OHS?

In 1984, 32 years ago, I took a six-month short term assignment in OH&S and it ended up being a career changer, from Engineering into OH&S.

2. What would you recommend as the best way to enter the OHS industry?

Years ago we were put in an OH&S position if you were hurt on the job or if you were too old and no longer able to handle the rigors of everyday physical labor. Today I would recommend that younger individuals start with taking some OH&S courses, look for an entry-level position and search for an OH&S mentor that you can learn from. Each person will possibly take a different path but the initial "feeling-out" process will help you in deciding if this is the field for you.

3. What were some of your past jobs?

I took my first position as the HSE Manager in a mining operation owned by Shell Canada in British Columbia. I spent a total of 15 years with Shell and 12 of those years were in a variety of HSE positions in different departments – Safety Supervisor Resources, HSE Manager Construction, Safety Management System Auditor, Safety Supervisor Drilling and Well Services, and Head of Coastal Safety in the Sultanate of Oman (Middle East).

Upon my return from the international assignment in the Middle East, I left Shell to go consulting and worked for two companies that allowed me to expand my safety knowledge and skills further – CenAlta Well Services and United Safety – and then established Benchmark Safety Inc. in 2001. We currently provide safety management services to a variety of clients in oil and gas, manufacturing, construction, etc. in Western Canada with about 80% of our clients based in the oil and gas sector.

4. How did you get hired for your current role?

After working with CenAlta and United Safety, I had the opportunity to purchase the Technical Services Division from United Safety and set up my own organization. It was

an opportunity to work with both Operating Companies and Contractors that were providing services to the Operating Companies, and provide them with OH&S support.

5. What are some of the milestones in your OHS career?

When I look back over the past 30 years in OH&S, I can certainly flag certain events or time periods when I made decisions to further both my career and make a contribution to the OH&S field.

- My initial joining of the CSSE back in 1985 and the opportunity to network with a group of OH&S individuals across Canada was my first adventure into the expansive area of OH&S.
- My work with Shell as the Head of Safety on a one billion dollar gas plant and gathering system project in central Alberta and working with over 700 contracting companies that performed work on the project in the three year construction phase.
- My two years as Manager HSE for Coastal Operations in Oman and the opportunity upon returning to Canada to work on a variety of projects as a consultant in Yemen, Dubai, Egypt, Australia and the United States.
- Obtaining my CRSP designation in 1999 made me realize the importance of and the requirement for minimum standards for OH&S professionals in Canada and then being elected to the Board of Governors in 2006 and again in 2008 for two-year terms.
- The establishment of Benchmark Safety Inc. and the opportunity to continue to expand OH&S services to companies in need of specialized safety support.
- The work involved in setting up the Alberta Occupational Safety Auditors Association in 2005.
- Receiving the Safety Professional of the Year award for Alberta, NWT and Nunavut last year from the CSSE.

6. What would you have done differently regarding your OHS career?

When I made the shift from Engineering and Operations into OH&S, I should have developed a better educational path and tried to obtain more OH&S education, although, back then there wasn't the same focus on OH&S as there is today. I was lacking in knowledge related to Industrial Hygiene, Ergonomics and Occupational Health, to name a few, and it took many years to get that level of knowledge and a better understanding the roles that those groups play within the OH&S area. I was lacking in the understanding of the differences between short-term (acute) and long-term

(chronic) exposures that occur to workers. All we need to do is take a look at the number of individuals that are passing away from illnesses that have developed due to long term exposures to chemicals, fumes, etc. to understand this shortcoming.

7. What used to be your biggest weakness when you first started in this field?

I came from a management position into the OH&S area so I had a pretty good understanding of the managerial and supervisory aspects of my job. What I was lacking was more formal education on OH&S and a better understanding of the interfaces of OH&S into the daily work performed by employees at all levels. It seemed at that time that there was high priority placed on “getting people to be productive” whereas it should have been more focused on “getting people to be productive but in a healthy and safe manner”.

8. If you had the ability to change anything regarding your career, what would it be?

Along the same lines as the previous question, I would have liked more OH&S education and a better understanding of hazards/risks/controls related to the workplace. This aspect has always been around but the emphasis hasn't been a priority until the past 10 years (e.g. Alberta only included hazard assessments in their OHS in legislation in 2004). I would have written my CRSP exam earlier in my career to take advantage of the recognition that goes along with this designation. I waited until I had 15 years OH&S experience before I wrote my exam and only after consulting on my own for three years.

9. Who would you recommend a recent graduate connect with?

I came from a different era and my path to becoming an OH&S professional was a little unorthodox, to say the least, and the emphasis on OH&S was not a priority like it is today.

In today's environment, I would recommend a recent graduate seek someone with 5-10 years' experience in OH&S that is able to relate how they recently got into the industry. This individual could become the mentor that new grads require to help chart their path to a career in the OH&S field and possibly offer them that much-needed entry-level position.

10. What are you most proud of?

You may think that I would be proud of some of major milestones or recognition that I've received but I'm most proud of my daughter Shannon that has followed in my footsteps. I don't want to say that I brainwashed my girls with the importance of OH&S but it was a very proud moment for me when Shannon mentioned that she would like to pursue a career in the OH&S area. She has been working with me for the past 14-15 years, has obtained her CRSP designation, and has now taken over the ownership and running of Benchmark Safety Inc. since my semi-retirement announcement two years ago. She's my "chip off the old block".

11. What professional organizations are you associated with and in what ways?

I'm a believer in keeping associated with the area that you work in and as such I've maintained connections in a few areas:

- CRSP – former Board Member for 4 years, Exam Writing Committee for 5 years, and currently a sub-committee member to the Exam Writing Committee
- CSSE – member for 30 years – former Calgary Chapter Chair, Vice Chair and Past Chair, Elk Valley Chapter Vice Chair, annual PDC committee member for two conferences in Calgary, presenter at annual conferences
- AOSSA – former Chair and Past Chair and current member
- AAC – member for past 7 years
- CIM – Honorary Life Member – since 1975
- APEGGA – member since 1982

12. What do you think is the most under-related skill required for success in the safety field?

The most under-related skill required for success in the safety field is Interpersonal skills. Our OH&S support role relies on interfacing with all levels of employees within organizations and having the ability to treat people with respect. We need to better understand and appreciate people's differences (values and beliefs) and how that impacts their health and safety awareness and performance on the job.