

Case Study 15.1

Lenny Lawson is a newly appointed field director at a medium-size manufacturing company, which employs about 3,000 employees. After a few days at the facility, Lawson asks to speak to you, the environmental health and safety (EH&S) manager. You are rather new to the facility yourself, only having been hired six months ago. You consider this your “dream job”—you increased your pay substantially from your previous job, and you are now much nearer to your supportive family. You arrive at Lawson’s office full of expectation and excitement in meeting the new director. After a few minutes of welcoming introductions, Lawson begins to lecture you that he thinks most of this “EH&S stuff” is a big pain and too costly for the typical benefits received. He states that in his vast experience, he believes that most EH&S requirements are not cast in stone, but rather in pliable clay—clay to be molded to maximize the company’s profits. He explains to you in a somewhat forceful tone that every EH&S decision related to the manufacturing company, including regulatory compliance and protecting employees and the environment, will be a cost-benefit analysis. The director further enlightens you to his philosophy by saying “I would appreciate it if you will never tell me that I and this company have to do this or have to do that from an EH&S perspective. You will need to provide to me with the costs versus benefits of all of your EH&S-recommended actions, including addressing regulations. We are a business first and everything boils down to being a business decision. Are we clear here? Can I count on you to implement my vision of EH&S and be a part of my team?”

Case Study 15.2

Background Information

Richard is the fifth safety and health manager to be appointed in the last six years at a large government-owned contractor-operated (GOCO) research laboratory. He received a substantial raise (30 percent salary increase) in this new position. Based on this raise and due to his ever-expanding family (his wife is about to give birth to twins), he purchased a much larger house near the research center.

Two of his safety and health manager predecessors had been reassigned to other, lesser duties (with a concomitant reduction in salary), seemingly following increases in injury and illness rates that were reported to the government customer. The other two previous safety and health managers simply left the organization for unknown reasons.

The research operations contract is on an "award-fee" basis, with 35 percent of the award fee based on safety and health performance, largely based on lagging indicator data. All senior managers, including the Director of the GOCO operation, are given large annual contract bonuses based on the safe operation of the facility.

Richard is a Certified Safety Professional (CSP) and has always wanted "do the right thing" in his career. After reviewing the past three years of first aid incident reports in order to do trend analyses, Richard is concerned that some of the cases and near misses could actually be classified as OSHA-recordable injuries. He schedules a meeting with his supervisor, the Vice President of Operations, to discuss how injuries have been investigated and recorded.

During the meeting, the VP makes it very clear that large sums of money are at stake if incident rates are high or increase or if previously determined incident rates are revised upward because they were misrepresented as being too low. He also suggests repeatedly that when determining if a case is an OSHA-recordable event, being conservative is not in the best interest of the company. The VP recommends to Richard "not to make waves" or "cause a ruckus" and that Richard needs to look at the "big picture" for the contract and the contractor. Richard thanks the VP for his input and leaves the meeting feeling conflicted.

The Dilemma

Richard is uncomfortable with the results of his meeting with the VP. If the cases are truly recordable and are not being recorded appropriately, then there is a possibility of deception taking place in the workplace. The level of risk that is being attributed to this work environment may be understated if the incident statistics are being skewed downward. Employee safety and health is possibly being jeopardized because corrective/preventive actions are not being implemented. On the other hand, there appear to be huge incentives present in the organization to be very conservative when classifying incidents, and the organization historically has been apt to replace safety and health managers in the past, possibly due to their role in wanting to more accurately report incident rates or when incident rates have increased. Also weighing on his mind is his increased mortgage and his moral responsibilities to support his growing family.

What should Richard do, given that there are so many drivers present for Richard to underreport incidents and incident rates? How could he, as a safety and health manager, respond in a manner that could possibly affect positive organizational change in this contractor organization in terms of promoting accurate incident reporting as well as preserving his career?