

Gross Effort vs. Net Impact: Culture is a net sum game of what we really do



everyone
home safe
every day

Dear all,

One of the most important things we've come to understand about safety culture is this: it isn't built in big leaps or defined by one-off successes. Instead, it's the sum of small, daily signals - what we consistently do, reinforce, allow, and ignore.

These signals, over time, either move us toward a safer, healthier culture or drag us away from it. And here's the crucial part: **positive and negative signals don't just sit side by side - they often cancel each other out.** Take this example: we might invest in excellent PPE and great communications. But if we fail to recognise the effort, risks, or unseen work that people put in every day, that silence may undo the benefit. **People don't just notice what you give them - they notice what you don't say too.**

Or we may talk a great deal about wellbeing, promote mental health initiatives, and encourage people to speak up. But if, at the same time, we regularly blur rest periods, expect work outside hours, or give unclear guidance when priorities clash, then those positive messages are not just diluted; they can actively harm trust. The net effect isn't neutral - it's negative. Saying the right things and doing something different doesn't balance out. It creates friction. That friction turns into confusion, disengagement, and ultimately, risk. That's why the net culture outcome matters. Because **people experience culture as a whole, not in separate boxes.** It's not "we said this" and "we also did that." It's: how did those things make me feel? Did they add up? Did they make sense together?

If they do, we build trust. If they don't, we lose it - even when our intentions are good. Here's what that means in practice:

- **A kind word in a briefing is powerful** - but only if it's backed by fair rosters and respected rest.



Rob Cairns,
Regional Managing Director

- **A great training session helps** - but only if people are then supported to apply what they've learned.
- **Clear risk assessments matter** - but only if the actual job reflects the planning.
- **Mental health support is vital** - but must be matched with clarity around demands and priorities.

Culture doesn't form around slogans or posters. It forms around patterns. And over time, those patterns leave us with either a net-positive culture - where people feel safe, supported, and valued - or a net-negative one, where good intentions get lost in contradiction or neglect. That's why we must be conscious of the full picture, not just each individual action, but how they combine. Because in the end, **people don't judge us by what we meant - they judge us by what added up.** Let's make sure we're sending signals that align. **Because when they do, the effect is not just cumulative - it's transformative.**

Thanks for reading. As ever, I'd welcome your thoughts and reflections - feel free to [email me directly](#).

Stay safe,
Rob