

Tips for Safety Personnel When Speaking to Military Commanders and Senior Civilian Leaders

As a safety professional, you will inevitably be required to talk to a senior civilian leader or a military commander regarding safety and occupational health (SOH). It may be to communicate an urgent issue, it may be a briefing following an inspection, audit, or assessment, or it may be part of a staff meeting. This one pager will guide you and offer tips to communicate effectively with your senior leader.

YOUR ETIQUETTE

As a civilian employee, you may not be familiar with military or agency protocols. Check with your organization's protocol officer or command suite for your organization's specific protocols and business rules. When you address your leadership:

1. Do so by rank, name, or simply sir or ma'am, as appropriate
2. Make and hold eye contact during your conversation, or when being spoken to by your military or civilian leader
3. Speak clearly, articulate your words, and do not rush; speak at an average conversational speed
4. Vary your tone of voice and emphasize key words, as appropriate
5. Take pauses when speaking to allow the leader time to interject with questions or comments
6. Focus on your physical appearance and posture:
 - a. Dress in business casual, at a minimum. If presenting to a military flag officer (e.g., general or admiral) or senior executive service civilian (flag officer equivalent), dress in business formal
 - b. Sit straight up; do not slouch
 - c. Use appropriate hand gestures to emphasize a point; do not use flamboyant or wild movements
 - d. Be direct, accurate, effective, and respect the leader's time



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Remember, communication is a two-way street and courteous interaction is important. Listen when spoken to; if your leader is speaking, do not interrupt, as what they are saying is essential for the organization and will guide your next steps.

YOUR CONTENT

Prepare your content wisely to ensure you convey your issues clearly and succinctly with emphasis on the impacts and effects to the organization. Find out how your leader prefers to communicate. Most expect read-ahead materials so they can be better prepared for the discussion. Some prefer written communication, such as quad charts, white papers, or decision briefs.

Let the leader know the purpose of your conversation, but most importantly, do not whine. Time with your leader is not to explain why efforts in safety are not going as well as you have planned. Rather, it is your opportunity to explain the current status of your leader's SOH program and inform them what is needed to facilitate solutions. If presenting a problem, offer at least one solution.

A good rule-of-thumb is to begin with the **Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF)**. You want to:

1. Describe the current topic or issue:

- a. Lay the foundation by explaining relevant program requirements or regulations
- b. Be factual – do not share perceived relationship issues or emotionally-based hurdles, these factors do not contribute to understanding requirements.

2. Explain your proposed solutions:

- a. Prioritize solutions to help your leader make risk-based decisions
 - i. Your leader needs information so they can make informed command decisions
 - ii. Leaders may accept certain levels of risk associated with not being 100% in compliance
 - iii. The decision is theirs to make; yours is to manage their SOH program with the resources and guidance they provide
- b. Explain what resources are needed and the benefit of those resources
- c. Explain what assistance you need as it relates to your proposed solutions.



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Your leader is ultimately accountable for a myriad of items (e.g., organizational performance, quality, training, safety). Your leader also has an operational mission to perform and relies on the SOH team and other professionals to mitigate organizational risks to an acceptable level. Effective SOH means better mission capability. Be sure to communicate with your leadership in the most effective way possible, allowing them to make the best decisions positively affecting organizational readiness. You need to emphasize and articulate how SOH has a profound impact on readiness.

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