

# Leadership Behaviors for Safety Excellence

**Chester Fort**  
Cottonton Sawmill Manager  
WestRock

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# The Safety Journey

If it were as simple as following the  
Yellow Brick Road...



# My Journey Down the Yellow Brick Road

- Grew up logging with my father & brothers – a family affair
- Started sawmill career 33 years ago as an hourly employee
- Progressed through the ranks to become manufacturing superintendent
- Worked six years for Weyerhaeuser, North Carolina
- Last eight years, working for WestRock, Cottonton Alabama

# When I realized I was no longer in Kansas...

- In 1997, named manufacturing superintendent at the Potlatch sawmill in Prescott, AR
- Faced with tremendous reliability and production issues
- Met year-end budget volumes, through months of hard work and a good supporting team -- felt pretty good
- Called to the mill manager's office to be told that safety issues and injuries seem to follow me
- Shocked and upset; personal decision day

# Vision

- All operations must have a safety vision
- Vision should be developed by the operating teams

*Safety is not a job. It's our way of life!!!*

**T E A M**

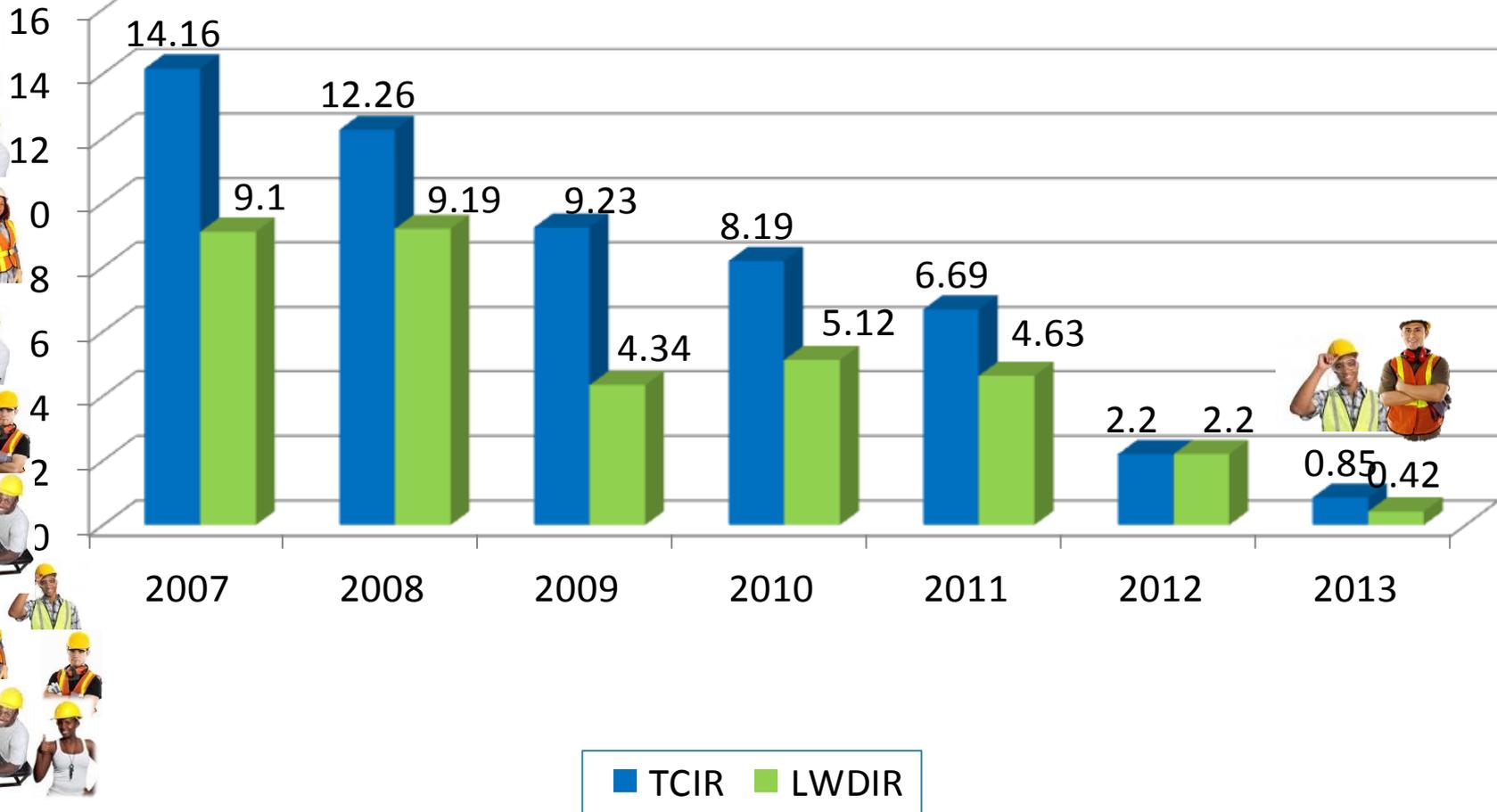
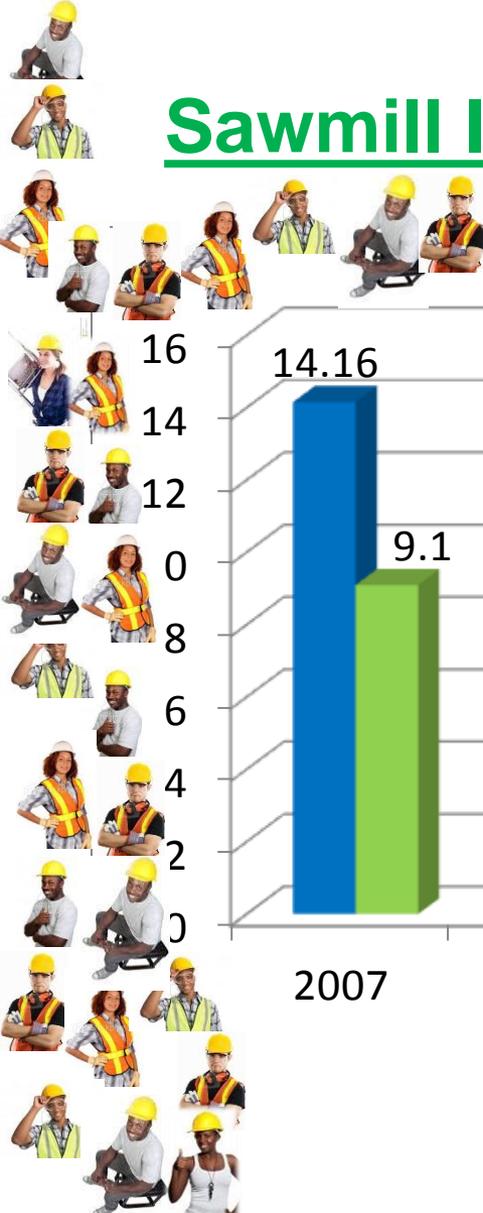
**TOGETHER EMPLOYEES ACCOMPLISH MORE**

Are you part of the safety team?

**WestRock**

The graphic features the word 'TEAM' in large, bold, black-outlined letters. Each letter is filled with a different industrial scene: 'T' shows a worker with a chainsaw, 'E' shows a worker with a forklift, 'A' shows a large pile of logs, and 'M' shows a worker with a forklift. Below the letters, the words 'TOGETHER EMPLOYEES ACCOMPLISH MORE' are written in bold, black, sans-serif font. The entire graphic is set against a background of industrial scenes and is framed by a green banner at the top and a blue banner at the bottom.

# Sawmill Injury Rates – Everything we do is about people



# We Must Develop a New Language and Mindset

- The idea that “People should do what they are told because they get paid” may be right, but...the reality is otherwise, whether leaders like it or not
- When leaders insist that people do things their way because they are the boss, Impasse replaces productivity. Stalemate and frustration result
- Our **goal** as a leader is to get people to want to do what they are supposed to do. Successful leaders **inspire** cooperation. People under their leadership want to do what should be done
- The most important place to start is with ourselves
- The only behavior we can truly control is our own. By **controlling ourselves**, we are more likely to influence the behavior of others

# Leadership Behaviors for Safety Excellence

- Leaders spend informal time on the operating floor building relationships and listening
- Leaders make it a point to know every employee's name and call each employee by name when they meet
- Leaders make it a point to learn something about the family or personal interests of each employee to establish a foundation for demonstrated caring; leaders also share something about themselves
- Leaders demonstrate genuine care and concern for off-the-job injuries, illnesses, or death involving an employee or family member
- Leaders expand the circle of genuine concern beyond employees to include injured contractors and their family

# Leadership Behaviors for Safety Excellence

## (cont'd)

- Leaders ALWAYS adhere to all safety standards, practices, and rules
- Leaders show a genuine concern for the injured/ill individual that far outweighs a concern for the impact on the safety statistics
- Leaders focus on prediction, prevention and the courage to care. They insist on reliable systems
- Leaders hold line management accountable leading safety including knowing the details of safety performance and the details of safety incidents and the status of follow-ups
- Leaders are actively engaged at all times with one or more persons at elevated risk. *Elevated risk has more to do with increased potential for injury than it does with injury history*

# Leadership Behaviors for Safety Excellence

## (cont'd)

- Leaders clearly communicate very clear expectations of employees regarding safe behavior
- Leaders conduct free and open communication (formal and informal) with the organization
- Leaders ensure that there are consequences for willful and unsafe behavior. This cannot happen only when there is an injury
- Leaders instill a true belief in an injury-free workplace and continually stretch, challenge, and focus the organization on the achievement of that goal
- Leaders make themselves readily available with an open door policy and encourage employees to take the time to bring unresolved safety concerns to their attention

# Leadership Behaviors for Safety Excellence

## (cont'd)

- Leaders set a good personal role model for a safe and healthy lifestyle
- Leaders ALWAYS personally intervene when an immediate unsafe condition or behavior is observed
- Leaders ensure that safety and health performance is a heavily weighted component of performance assessments for direct reports
- Leaders are actively involved in supporting the local education system and support local safety, health and wellness activities

# No one else can do it for you

At the end of the movie, Glinda, the Good Witch, informs Dorothy she has always had the power to go home. “Why didn’t you tell me?” Dorothy rightly inquires, only to be told, “Because you had to find out for yourself.” Some things you simply have to experience for yourself. Leadership is one of them.





Leadership is much more than telling people to go down the Yellow Brick Road. It's about authentically engaging them in the adventure!

*Thank you very much*

