Safety Army of One
Victor Lawe, PS-MESH

I want to start this article by getting to know a little bit about you. What is your official job title? Is it safety specialist, safety coordinator, safety officer, safety manager, safety director, EHS manager or vice president of safety? Safety professionals may have different titles, but we have one thing in common. We touch safety and other ancillary topics that either directly or indirectly impact safety.

Let's talk about those "other duties as assigned" or additional duties that are not fully covered by OSHA.

Let's play a bingo game. Cross off each item you are responsible for in your current role.

B	I	N	G	O
Workers Compensation	DOT Clearinghouse	Safety Policy development	ISO compliance	Request For Proposal
Hearing conservation	Safety shoes	Budget proposals	CDL program	Payroll
Chief Administrator of a safety software	Wellness	**FREE SPACE**	Payroll deductions	Fire Prevention
Ergonomics	Defensive Driving training	Tier II Reports	Risk Management	Drug testing
ADA	Safety award program	Employee Assistance Program	Management of Change	Accident Investigations

Did you get bingo? Or did you cross all of these items off your bingo card?

If you are doing all of this by yourself then Nick Fury, director of S.H.I.E.L.D. would like to talk to you about a new initiative! Seriously, that is superhero-level performance, especially if you are, like most of us, a Safety Army of One.

The purpose of this article is not to identify what some of us do, or don't do. I want you to take a hard introspective look at what you do and most importantly why you do it. Just because you inherited some of these tasks from your predecessor doesn't always mean YOU should be doing it. Just because *"we've always done it that way"*, doesn't mean we should continue to do so.

One method is to document, document and document. Through documentation, we can make data-driven decisions that inform what belongs in our swim lane and what doesn't. Document a calendar of all of the routine monthly, quarterly and annual tasks you perform.

Here's what mine looks like:

FIGURE 1

January	February	March	April
Quarterly Exec safety Review	Announce City Manager Safety Award winners	EPA Tier II reports due	Quarterly Exec safety Review
OSHA 300/300A logs due	Bureau of Labor Statistics report due	Attend & support safety training for WQS	Eastern Carolina Safety & Health Conference New Bern, NC
APPA safety award application due	NCDOL safety award applications due	VARB board meeting	Attend & support safety training for WQS
Electri-Cities safety award application due	Attend & support safety training for WQS	Safety Committee meeting	Quarterly WC case review
American Gas Association safety award application due	VARB board meeting	Update random drug testing database	VARB board meeting
Audit external scheduled safety training	Safety Committee meeting	Complete safety shoe deductions	Safety Committee meeting
Attend & support safety training for WQS	Update random drug testing database	Audit external scheduled safety training	Update random drug testing database
Quarterly WC case review	Complete safety shoe deductions	Submit budget request for safety	Complete safety shoe deductions
Complete City Manager safety award list	Audit external scheduled safety training	Energy Resources safety committee	Audit external scheduled safety training
VARB board meeting	Energy Resources safety committee	Complete End of Month safety summary	Quarterly Parks & Rec safety committee
Safety Committee meeting	Complete End of Month safety summary	National Ladder Safety Month	Energy Resources safety committee
Updated random drug testing database	Safety Data Sheet inventory month	Conduct safety inspections: Ladders	Complete End of Month safety summary
Complete safety shoe deductions	Conduct safety inspections: Fall Protection	Police Department safety committee	Distracted Driver Awareness Month
Quarterly Parks & Rec safety committee	Police Department safety committee	Submit article to ASSP Healthbeat magazine	National Workzone Awareness Month
Energy Resources safety committee	Submit 2 articles to City Worker Update	Submit 2 articles to City Worker Update	Conduct safety inspections: Cranes
Complete End of Month safety summary	Process safety challenge coin awards	Process safety challenge coin awards	Police Department safety committee
Police Department safety committee			Submit 2 articles to City Worker Update
Submit 2 articles to City Worker Update			Process safety challenge coin awards
Process safety challenge coin awards			

What obvious things do you see? January is my busiest month. It looks like a lot until you drill down to determine how much time is available to me in January. Twenty working days x 8 hours (-ish) = 160 hours. 160 hours / 19 **known** tasks = 8.4 hours per task. Does it take me that long to complete each of them? No. The same should be true in your world. The direct time on the task averages about an hour. The indirect time used to prepare for these tasks is unaccounted for. It is where I work a little on each task as I near the deadline. Over half of these task are completed ahead of schedule which gives me extra capacity to focus on other safety tasks.

Though you may staff the safety section by yourself, you are not alone. You have informal and formal subject experts within and without. These human resources are walking and talking encyclopedias of knowledge and experience. I am referring to our co-workers and our fellow safety officers in both the public and private sectors. Safety is universal and horizontal in that it touches every industry and everyone. We can learn from each other. We can vent to each other in a psychologically safe space with a peer or mentor who speaks our acronym heavy language of OSHA, ANSI, NFPA, DOT, ISO, and the like.

Have you heard the term "workload indicators"? Don't feel bad if not, it was new to me too! This is a human resource management tool. It determines how many health workers of a particular type are required to cope with the workload of a given (health) facility and assesses the workload pressure of the (health) workers in the facility.

Let's look at something called the DMAIC process. This Six Sigma methodology tells us to:

Define what it is that we do. Your job description is a good starting point. Compare this document to what you actually do. Define what adds value to your various customers. Observe the gaps between what is documented and what is performed and ask the hard question, *"Why?"*

Measure these routine tasks on a spreadsheet. Each month calculate the number of times each task is performed.

Analyze at the end of each quarter where your peaks and valleys are.

Improve our process by using any of these methods:
- Eliminate any waste or duplication of effort
- Streamline or level the task load so one month is not as burdensome to a month that has excess capacity
- Ask for help during your busy season
- Reschedule tasks
- Cancel tasks
- Ask your customers about the perceived value of these services. *"If this were to go away, what affect would it have on your operation? Is it a nice-to-have or a need-to-have?"*

Control your calendar and the number of tasks you perform.

Document your workload indicators of the business-as-usual routine tasks you perform month to month.

FIGURE 2

	WC Claims processed	Vehicle Accident reports processed	CDL Reimbursements processed	Safety Training Classes Held	# of employees received safety training	Safety shoe deductions processed	Prescription Safety Glasses processed	# of safety inspections	# of training aids distributed	# of policies updated
TARGET	N/A	N/A	>12	>24	>250	N/A	N/A	>48	>120	>6
January	5	8	0	4	27	14	0	2	16	0
February	13	6	8	4	24	5	5	5	15	0
March	8	7	0	7	57	12	1	9	17	0
April	11	6	1	7	72	10	1	8	28	0
May	9	7	0	4	40	16	1	9	28	6
June	15	7	0	13	169	12	0	9	35	0
July	12	7	0	6	55	2	1	5	19	2
August	13	10	1	7	64	69	0	18	28	2
September	6	6	1	7	39	0	1	8	30	0
October-21	11	5	1	6	53	32	3	8	42	0
November	10	8	1	6	52	19	0	11	25	2
December	5	10	2	2	22	7	2	8	27	2
TOTAL	118	87	15	73	674	198	15	100	310	14
			COMPLETED	COMPLETED	COMPLETED			COMPLETED	COMPLETED	COMPLETED

What value do these two documents provide?
The calendar shows your <u>scheduled</u> peaks and valleys throughout the year. The workload indicator (WLI) shows <u>actual</u> outputs. Your WLI will quickly illustrate processes that are out of your control. These are things like:

- Number of workers' compensation cases processed
- Number of vehicle accident reports processed
- Number of CDL reimbursements processed
- Number of safety shoes purchased
- Number of prescription safety glasses purchased

When your WLI is compared to your calendar it shows available capacity. From these documents you can generate Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic Timely (SMART) goals on the things you can control. Using the figure above, you can control the number of safety classes you will teach, but not the number of employees who attend. Let's say you set a SMART goal of teaching 24 classes in the calendar year. Using <u>Figure 2</u> as an example and the following performance scale:

Outstanding (41+)
Exceeds Expectations(31-40)
Meets Expectations (23-30)
Does Not Meet Expectations (15-22)
Unsatisfactory (0-10)

How would you rate? If you said outstanding and justified it by saying the outputs tripled the established SMART goal, you would be correct.

How would you adjust the goal for the following year? Have a discussion about upcoming demand and capacity to determine whether or not the goal needs to be adjusted. In this case I was having a banner year filling in for two safety training consultants. I have since hired a replacement safety training consultant and these outputs will drop. I agreed to keep the goal in place.

If these functions degrade our normal job duties, delegating or reassigning of duties is an option. But as professionals you need to know when to ask for help. Consider automating these functions? Do you maintain, update and enter data on good old-fashioned Excel spreadsheets? Can you afford to field a safety management software? Safety management software is a tricky, expensive, automated jungle to navigate if you have never been exposed to one.

Is it possible to delegate these duties? Before you delegate any tasks be sure to document your process into a digestible standard operating procedure with as many visuals and graphics as possible. Use the SOP as a guide and perfect it as you train your replacement. Fill in any gaps before you make it a standard.

As safety changes, demand for your body of knowledge will need to grow with it. As you build relationships within your organization as safety coaches who are available to provide teachable moments to your customers, your span of control increases. Set your own limits based on your capacity and make data-driven decisions.