

# ESTA NEWSLETTER Special Edition

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## Learning from the air by Blanca Claeysens

Nowadays, almost every company has a SHEQ officer, or even a whole department dedicated to Health and Safety.

We have policies and procedures. Clients require HSE plans, prevention plans and detailed risk assessments. There is plenty of documentation available, as well as a variety of tools.

These are integrated into daily routines alongside lifesaving rules, toolbox talks, safety observation cards and Gemba walks.

When an accident occurs, we analyse it using different methods such as the '5 Whys' and the '8D' method.

**" Why can't we be more open and honest, sharing our experiences so that others can learn from them without taking the same risks? "**

**" Let's face it: in many industries the culture of reporting is underdeveloped "**



## **Why progress seems difficult**

And yet, we still have the impression that we are repeating ourselves and achieving little more than wearing PPE on site and compiling an endless to-do list of equipment modifications required to enhance safety.

Why is this? Are we not present in the field enough? Or is there not enough reporting? We have all the necessary tools, and we reach a certain level, but it is so difficult to progress beyond that.

We have the slogans, and they are really part of our culture: 'Safety first', 'Safety is everyone's responsibility', 'Stay alert, don't get hurt' and so on.

Well, I've got news for you. It's not about the tools, analysis, slogans or documentation.

## **The limits of documentation and tools**

Documentation is just a way of covering your ass.

How many risk assessments have I read for a job where half of them are not applicable because they are copied and pasted from a previous job or are generic documents made by the health and safety department?

Tools are useless if they are not backed up by common sense.

Please don't put your cat in the microwave. Please wear your helmet and gloves. How many toolbox talks are just a waste of time because we talk about the obvious instead of the day's specific tasks?

**" Documentation is just a way of covering your ass "**



## Lessons from aviation

In the cockpit, we do something similar just before take-off: we hold a briefing, but we don't discuss the obvious. We spend 30 seconds on 'expect the unexpected': what dangers might there be?

The idea is to be prepared, not to fulfil another procedure. Every sentence should have a purpose. So no generic chitchat.

Another important difference lies in the 'just culture' of the aviation sector. Employees are encouraged to report incidents, near misses or even just improper decisions.

The focus is on learning from mistakes rather than assigning blame. This approach has fostered a robust reporting culture and a comprehensive system for continuous improvement.

## Reporting culture: aviation vs. industry

Let's face it: in many industries, the culture of reporting is less mature. Errors are sometimes viewed as personal failures, which discourages transparency and leads to underreporting.

As a result, unsafe conditions may go unnoticed and valuable lessons may be lost. At best, the analysis reveals an employee error and the client insists on taking action - firing them, for example. Well, explain to me how firing someone who you have just invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in to avoid making the same mistake again could possibly be beneficial.

Beyond action, there is 'shame', because when an accident happens, it seems difficult to talk about it in the industry. Near-misses should stay within the company, and data should be treated confidentially. Why? Why can't we just be open and honest, sharing our experiences so that others can learn from them without facing the same risks?



## Culture over comfort

**You're starting to get it: it's about a cultural shift.**

Another example is SOPs (standard operating procedures), procedures everybody knows and follows to the letter. Every pilot can fly with any other pilot in the company because they all stick to the same procedures.

Yes, when we land, we like to grab a drink with the funny co-pilot or the cool captain, but this is rarely granted.

A real team is not just 'the same people working together for many years', but two people working together with just enough suspicion to ensure a decent cross-check.

So arguing that 'I only work with this guy because we make a good team' is more often than not a dangerous attitude than one that is really good for safety.

## A shared goal: embedding Safety

I could go on for hours comparing aviation and the industry (hence the book I'm writing), but ultimately, both sectors have the same goal: to embed safety as a core value in every decision and action.

Here at the ESTA HSE Commission, we are eager to find out what you need. We want to know how you feel and what you could use from us. Because we want to move forward as an industry.

**" The future of safety starts with you: help us take the next step! "**

# Join the conversation!

We are therefore creating a Safety Survey, to be launched at ESTA's next gathering in Copenhagen.



When available, we would be grateful if you could take a few minutes to complete it and share your thoughts.

Your opinion matters and your input will help us to strengthen our safety culture together. Would you be willing to share data? Would the survey go straight to the HSE department and no one else? Is there a difference between what is said and what is done or felt? How long does it take for boundaries to be pushed when pressure rises? When material is unavailable or too costly for the client, what is the solution? Have you ever said no? We can learn so much from you — please share whatever you are ready to.

Thank you in advance and stay tuned for the ESTA Safety Survey.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Blanca Claeysens** has built her career around safety, drawing on experience in aviation, transport, and heavy lifting. She started out as an airline captain before moving into management and later founding **ASA France**, where she helps organizations benefit from aviation's proven safety practices. Blanca is an active member of **ESTA's Health, Safety and Environment Commission**, working to strengthen safety culture, encourage prevention, and support risk management in the lifting and transport sector. Passionate about sharing knowledge and driving cultural change, Blanca brings a fresh, cross-sector perspective to making safety a true value in daily work.

