



## Building an HRO (High Reliability Organization)

By Hal Johnson

Recently I was reading about the challenging environment of a nuclear aircraft carrier. Here are some of the characteristics:

- Manned by a bunch of 20-year olds
- Deadly jet engines that can suck a person into the jet intake if too close
- Jet exhausts that can severely burn a man or blow him overboard
- Jet fighter take-offs that reach 150 mph in 2 seconds
- Landings that essentially are controlled crashes
- Fueling aircraft with engines running
- Handling of explosive materials

Yet, for all the hazards, accidents on flight decks are surprisingly rare. Because so many things could go wrong but almost never do, experts consider this a “high reliability organization.” The clarity about responsibility for one’s performance as well as interfacing with team members is astounding. The communication and heads-up performance is crucial for success. Success is dependent on each person understanding what is expected of him, and understanding how what he does complements the work of the rest of the team. Makes sense right?

Many of us have participated in this level of preparation and attention to detail when the stakes have been high for the specific project we have been involved with. But think of what is needed to enable this level of performance EVERYDAY!

Okay, let’s shift gears. First, I have to admit I have not seen the level of high reliability performance you find on a flight deck of an aircraft carrier in very many mid-market businesses. I have seen small units in a business that had really embraced continuous

improvement make some fantastic improvements. Let’s face it. For businesses, the stakes are not as high as they are on a flight deck. But, the principle is there for us to apply – clarity and preparedness escalates the predictability of success.

Look at your business organization. Think about this outline of preparedness for each business unit (BU):

1. *Prepare the description of the 3-5 most important functions of each BU (that contribute to key results for success).*
2. *What is necessary for each function to be performed optimally?*
3. *What should the measured results be for each results area (success criteria)?*
4. *What processes should be used to assure timely, accurate, high quality performance?*
5. *How will customer satisfaction (internal & external) and targeted results be measured and achieved?*

How high do the stakes have to get for us to shift into a higher mode of clarity and preparedness? As business leaders, we are the ones who get to make that decision. If this is an area of leadership you would like to read more about, email me and I will send you my white paper on **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT - Accountability Based Job Performance** (Best Practice Summary). What a great time to concentrate on building high reliability into your organization.

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*Hal Johnson has been CEO of eight companies and has authored three books on business performance. He is Chairman/Co-founder of LeadershipOne, a business transition consulting firm.*

*He may be reached at (916) 391-3042 or at [hjohnson@leadershipone.net](mailto:hjohnson@leadershipone.net)*