

Safety+Health[®]

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What's next
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2021 CEOs WHO "GET IT"



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The 2021 CEOs Who “GET IT”

Safety depends on leaders who understand and support it from the top down, ensuring every major business decision is made with safety in mind. That is the definition of a CEO who gets it.

The eight honorees recognized this year are leaders with decades of experience. These individuals hail from multiple industries and are passionate about safety and the impact it has on their employees, their organizations and their communities. They set bold goals, focus on continuous improvement and deliver strong results, recognizing that safety never stops.

In moving safety beyond compliance, CEOs who “get it” are able to address the myriad safety challenges present in organizations in which risk comes in many different forms. When Jeff Owens pushed for a Live Safety/Beyond Zero culture at Advanced Technology Services, the goal was to encourage all employees to “make safety a way of life, in and out of the workplace.” Meanwhile, Keryn James, ERM CEO, has focused on improving both leading and lagging metrics to sustain a high level of safety performance.

CEOs who “get it” lead by example, like Stephen Sandherr, CEO of Associated General Contractors of America, who uses his voice to promote safety beyond the walls of his organization, raising public awareness around high-risk areas such as work zones.

As leaders, they take time to listen to employee concerns and connect on topics that go beyond physical safety,

paying attention to concerns around psychological safety as well as mental health issues. With the health and safety of employees and their families as a “North Star,” these leaders drive the evolution of their organizational safety culture. Mark Vergnano, CEO of The Chemours Co., set an aggressive goal of improving Chemours’ safety performance by 75% by going deeper to create a companywide “safety obsession” mindset. Phil Breidenbach, president and project manager at Savannah River Remediation, has built a foundation of trust through a personal approach of making sure all employees are on the safety journey.

By using every tool at their disposal, such as promising technology, these leaders are able to address workplace safety performance, including driver safety behavior. For example, John E. Eschenberg, president and CEO of Washington River Protection Solutions, and Jeremy Kucera, president of Duro Electric, invested in safety practices and training for every employee on Day One. Each leader may have his or her own credo and leadership style, but all, like Mike Choutka, president and CEO of Hensel Phelps, believe that “working safely is the most important thing we do.”

Every worker in America deserves a CEO who gets it, and these eight individuals not only inspire their own employees, colleagues and other industry leaders, they help people live their fullest lives, from the workplace to anyplace.

The National Safety Council congratulates the 2021 honorees. **S+H**





JOHN E. ESCHENBERG

**PRESIDENT AND CEO
WASHINGTON RIVER PROTECTION SOLUTIONS LLC
RICHLAND, WA**

Washington River Protection Solutions, an Amentum-led company with more than 3,000 employees, is committed to the safe and efficient management, retrieval and treatment of 56 million gallons of radioactive and hazardous waste stored in 177 underground storage tanks at the U.S. Department of Energy's Hanford site. The Hanford site is one of the largest nuclear cleanup projects in North America.

Describe your personal journey to becoming a CEO who "gets it."

At an early age, I learned the value of safety in the workplace through my own personal work experiences and by observing the consequences of unsafe actions by others. When I was just out of high school, I took a job in the building and construction industry. It was my first real exposure to the workplace and, without any training, I had no real sense or appreciation for a safe work environment underpinned by solid work practices.

My inexperience resulted in a number of unforgettable safety lessons that indelibly shaped not only my personal behaviors but helped form who I am as a company leader. Over the course of about a year on that job, I recall four specific events, each sending me home in worse condition than when I arrived for work that morning. I was shocked while working on an unsecured electrical circuit. I suffered an injury when a piece of metal became embedded in my eye while drilling on an I-beam, resulting in a trip to the emergency room. I tipped over (forward, thankfully) an overloaded forklift while unloading lumber. Lastly, I had to

make an emergency visit to the dentist after being hit in the mouth with a wooden beam. I will never forget the pain and discomfort of having 11 teeth wired back into place.

At that point, while sitting on the ridgeline of an asphalt-shingled roof in the middle of a sweltering South Carolina summer, I decided that I would go to college. As a student, I worked nights and weekends in a university's hospital radiology department as an X-ray technician, working in the emergency room and supporting the surgical suite. That experience brought me face to face with severely injured patients who arrived at the one of the state's Level I trauma centers with life-threatening injuries. Some of these were victims of industrial accidents that resulted from falls from significant height, a collapsed trench, rotating equipment and just basic industrial events. These injuries left some with broken bones and others with a life-long disability. A few, unfortunately, died. Once again, I had experienced a front-row seat to the consequences of industrial hazards, much of it stemming from either a lack of safety focus by the employer or an employee's failure to follow established procedures, including looking out for co-workers.



Read the full Q&A
at sh-m.ag/2K20o1v.

It was not until I became associated with the Navy's nuclear program that I developed a full understanding of the rigor and discipline necessary to ensure worker safety in high-hazard operating environments. It started when I was a co-op employee at the Charleston Naval Shipyard. While there, I completed a nuclear apprentice training program. Later, I worked outside the shipyard directly for the Naval Sea Systems Command, where I spent time on submarines and nuclear-related support installations. That experience introduced me to the true meaning of safety in the workplace and raised my standards to a high level that I have maintained throughout my career. Now, nearly 30 years after those experiences, I realize how they served to fortify not only my personal commitment to keep workers safe, but also to guide a necessary level of conservative decision-making in almost every aspect of my professional life.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- John provides top-down and side-by-side leadership on all safety-related fronts. He embodies the practice of leadership by example, and expects employees to incorporate sound safety and health principles at work, at home and in the community.
- He embodies the principles of strong safety culture by speaking to employee groups and routinely recognizing worker efforts and contributions.
- John asked for an independent safety culture evaluation near the end of a significant contract period to ensure an effective transition to a new contractor.