

Beyond the Cattle Dip: Cleanskin Safety Commitment

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Welcome, everyone! Thank you so much for coming.

Now before I start I need to formally acknowledge the support I receive from what I call my 'brain's trust'. I have a group of about 30 people whose values and safety perspectives I greatly respect and admire. They range from general managers to boilermakers and they have all given me valuable feedback for this presentation.

CTS is based in Moranbah. In March this year, in Moranbah, we had a 22 year old father of a newborn baby die in a welding accident. It was his second day on the job.

And then in June we had a 21 year old killed by being trapped in a conveyor belt at a nearby quarry. It was an hour into his first shift. Sean's mother's statement to the press was simply: *"I wish he never went to the mines"*.

There is a very large elephant in the lounge room that is getting bigger all the time. If we don't seriously address the growing responsibility of our industry to look after our cleanskins, more people will get hurt. It's as simple as that.

While facilitating a Safety Alignment session just last week I asked the 35 Supervisors in the room what was their greatest fear safety wise for the upcoming dragline shutdown. The overwhelming response from over 500 years of combined mining experience was "cleanskins". As one fellow put it to me: *"They just don't know what can kill you and how easily it could happen"*.

So firstly let's get crystal clear about what we are really talking about. What actually is a 'cleanskin' and how many are there?

Historically the term 'cleanskin' was first used in the 1860's in the bush. It referred to any unbranded cattle.

It's also slang for someone with no criminal convictions; or a bottle of wine with no branding to tell us what winery it comes from; or even more recently a person with no tattoos.

However for our purposes we are referring to someone with no mining experience. From a safety perspective this therefore includes all unskilled, semi-skilled and even skilled workers with no experience in Australia's mining sector. Keep in mind that this may soon also include skilled migrants from overseas as well.

Now, despite the two recent tragic examples I just referred to, don't for a second assume that this means just young people. The reality is that less than 10% of our industry's workforce is under 25 and 31% of current new recruits are actually 50 years or older (*Heartbeat Report Kinetic Group 2012 p25*)

Now what about numbers? Is this a significant enough cohort to demand our immediate safety attention? The same report above concluded that *"the industry will need up to 30,000 skilled and semiskilled workers by 2015 if it is going to meet productivity goals"*. The CEO's additional comment was that *"if that figure is going to be even remotely achievable we have to start providing opportunities for new entrants to be a part of this industry's workforce"* These are what we call cleanskins. So yes we can readily accept that over the next couple of years the cleanskin cohort is going to grow exponentially.

How we introduce these inexperienced workers safely into our industry is the new challenge for this new era in Health and Safety. That same report again: *"investment in "cleanskin" programs that provide new inexperienced workers with pathways into the industry are critical to reduce workplace risk"* (P32)

So how are we going with all this so far? How seriously are we addressing the fact that if a worker is new to the industry, new to our site, and then we put them in a job that is unfamiliar to them, then they are immediately and indisputably in a high risk category? How are we currently responding to this tidal wave of demand from a safety perspective?

Well there are a myriad of safety inductions and pre-employment courses available and the quality of them varies dramatically.

Some are delivered by contractors to the mining companies, some by external training companies, and even high schools. The prices range from \$1500 to \$15,000 and last from one day sitting on the computer to 3 weeks full time with all sorts of fancy bells and whistles including high tech simulators.

Don't get me wrong, there are definitely some genuine, well considered programs out there. However, sadly enough, many, if not most of these courses, are what I would call 'cattle dips'. A cattle dip is a tank or a trough where cattle or sheep are quickly immersed in heavy duty chemicals in order to kill parasites. The one-size-fits-all rapid dips we accept for our cleanskins just barely cover the legislative requirements. They are generic, one dimensional, event based, 'surface skims'.

As a short term clarification of local safety and compliance expectations they do tick the boxes. However the primary focus is clearly the importance of completing the required assessment to allow access to the site. They are guaranteed to demotivate and glaze the eyes of even the most determined learner. The overriding impression is that the employer is simply going through the motions because they legally have to and every single day this sends out a deeply negative safety message to our highly impressionable cleanskins.

The training and learning gaps of our current programs, even those with all good intentions, can be readily explained within the psychology of learning. The Research Institute of America has found that after just 33 minutes of sitting through a single, formal training event the attendees only retain 58% of the material covered. And three weeks later this drops to 15% retention.

These are scary statistics for our cleanskins starting work the next day.

Thankfully though there are a few more thoughtful approaches starting to hit the ground. The trick is to deliver training that resonates, that cracks the veneer. Underground mines in particular seem to be leading the way and have some excellent examples of more developed and engaging programs

Perhaps, as an underground safety manager explained to me, it has something to do with the inherently high risk nature of this sector:

“Cleanskins and lack of experience is an increasing issue for us. The pool of experienced miners is shrinking to the point where 2-3 years in Underground is now considered a really long time! Unfortunately it also means that we have less people who have been around for the big disasters; the heightened risk perception and emotion has decreased over the generations”.

Across the Bowen Basin for many years now CTS have been doing our bit to shift the languid disconnection of these standardised events by providing what we call Safety Alignment Sessions. They range from 4 hours to 2 days and may have 25 people or 250. The structure and delivery is all based on the simple learning premise that once we get people *discussing* safety their retention rates soar to 70%; and when teaching others it goes to 90%. We have a tough challenge because these people have all been effectively desensitized by the cattle dips and are about to start work the very next day.

We listen, a lot, we prod and challenge and tease out all the unknowns and the frustrations and work through them together. We provide a safe forum for people to ask absolutely anything. We shake them up and wake them up with real life, near death experiences shared through the wisdom of the elders. Prior to the day we also source and coach some natural safety leaders (from all different trades) and then assist them while they facilitate highly interactive discussions and activities. Participation and sharing of experiences is the key. These sessions are intense, non-theoretical, real and relevant. As well as numerous comments from the old timers such as: *“the most memorable, enjoyable and productive induction I have had from 15 years of mining throughout Australia”*, the cleanskin feedback in particular has been extremely encouraging: *“now all this safety stuff makes sense” “I now feel compelled to work safely” “You could have just saved someone’s life, maybe mine”*. This is where we need to set the bar for what we accept.

I strongly believe that we have at the very least a moral responsibility to dramatically improve what we do before cleanskins commence work on our sites. We need to fire up and connect and engage with our cleanskins. Yes there is dry information that needs to be delivered but the real stuff lies in waking them up and sparking their desire to learn more.

So now let’s go to Day One, where the rubber really hits the road.

Keep in mind that we are planning to have tens of thousands of cleanskins, all with no tangible frames of reference, going down a shaft, or up a boom, or along a haul road. Now of course we can’t bubble wrap the whole mine site. There are always going to be hazards and there is always going to be the random human factor. So let’s just get on with it ay. We’ve done our bit to tell them about what they have to do so the rest is up to them, right? Sorry I don’t agree with this approach, at all. Even the best training in the world should only be the beginning of the learning development of our cleanskins.

Assuming we have already done our very best to inform, align, maximise assimilation and kick start awareness we now need to look at how to enhance the application of these new skills. Competency in safety is only built when applied, developed and reinforced in a real world setting. We need to invest in a robust on boarding structure and delivery process that incrementally steps our cleanskins through all of the safety related competences for their positions. And to create ownership, accountability and true commitment to working safely takes both time and commitment from the company itself. Rest assured however that this effort will reap huge rewards in safe production.

What I am going to discuss with you all now is just a brief introduction into what I would call a best practice Cleanskin Coordination Program and while providing safety support on many sites CTS has assisted in getting a lot of these ideas implemented successfully.

First, real simple, all the cleanskin's get given a different coloured hard hat to everyone else. (I know of one site that uses hot pink which is good for keeping egos in check). This is so everyone knows they are inexperienced. It is regularly stressed how we need to look after our cleanskins and take the time to help them understand both why and how we do things the way we do round here. The whole site community is encouraged and expected to assist in raising our cleanskins. They get the same coloured hard hat as everyone else when they formally 'graduate'. This will take anywhere from 3 - 6 months.

Next we give them their own customised competency log book. This is assessed and signed off as they progress through the application *and* demonstration of their learning's. It contains key performance indicators and rankings in all safety related activities. It does take time to develop this powerful tool and we need to consult with all of our experienced workers to determine the gaps specific to tasks within their areas. We must guarantee it drives the right behaviour at the right levels. It needs to include not just tools of the safety trade (JHA's, permits etc.) but also behavioural demonstrations of things like positive communication and exemplary housekeeping for example. It also must remain a fluid document; it's regular updating and review helps refresh the safety focus required by everyone.

Now: 'Safety Leadership'. Cleanskins are by definition a clean slate and their first impressions are not easily erased, good or bad. Their very first day is a unique, teachable moment, not to be underestimated. At this point we have both a magnificent opportunity and a great safety responsibility. Combine this with the fact that the senior leaders of any organisation are the most potent force in driving a safe culture. We must convince our senior managers (as high up the Org. Chart as possible) to spend even just 5 or 10 minutes one-on-one with each of our cleanskins. They need to speak with them from the heart; positively and passionately reiterating the number one priority of working safely on our sites. This one simple act forms a deep and lasting impression on cleanskins who often refer back to its significance months down the track.

Now the pointy end of cleanskin familiarisation: the coaching or mentoring program. It is very common to see the old buddy system still in place on lots of sites. In the new era of health and safety however we urgently need to transform this all too casual approach onto an organised, sophisticated and well-resourced on-site program for learning development. This is what will make or break our cleanskins. We cannot rely on the tokenism of just giving someone a buddy. There is too much at stake here.

Only 3 weeks ago I was chatting to a cleanskin on his first day at work as a T/A. He is a landscape gardener by trade, had never seen a dragline before, and during crib he asked me for some help. He had his distinctive newcomer hard hat on and he had a buddy, somewhere. He was the 'standby person' for the confined space of the tub, a safety role with a multitude of potentially lifesaving duties. To his credit he was seriously concerned; it takes a lot of gumption for cleanskins to ask for outside help. He didn't have a clue about what could go wrong or what to do if something did. This approach is all too common and seriously not good enough.

'Coaching' describes the process used to transport people from where they are to where they want and need to be. In our context it is the art of facilitating the safety learning, awareness, performance and development of a cleanskin. It is way beyond buddying. A coach is someone who keeps you focused. They provide support without taking away your personal responsibility.

A mentor, originally a Greek God, is a term meaning someone who imparts their skills and wisdom with a less experienced colleague. He or she is not within the cleanskin's supervisory line of management and may even be a peer. They challenge, share resources and advice, build self-confidence and explain how everything works. They do not accept low standards or risk taking; in fact just the opposite. They set high performance expectations and inspire the cleanskin to excellence. They are an advocate and a compatible support. They are a solid, foundation relationship the cleanskin can depend on. Ideally we want mentors who coach, both giving guidance and sharing of their broad experience. Over time they build the cleanskin's levels of awareness and personal accountability with structure, support and feedback.

As part of our safety support on site CTS embeds itself within the crews and during this process we uncover and provide clear profiles of all likely mentor candidates. The right choice (and then the appropriate support) for these individuals is hugely important. And they are out there; they are worth fishing for and they are worth their weight in gold for what they can give back. There is an untapped resource of positive, hardworking individuals who possess a quiet but deep personal commitment to working safely each and every day. And some of these also have a natural inclination to helping others out along the way. These are the humble champions of interdependence who usually go unrecognised, let alone untapped. They are positive self-enablers with clear, concise and respectful communication skills. They are always good listeners. They have street cred experience and knowledge. They value and believe in all of the safety tools and processes. However when searching do keep in mind that that the formal job role of a potential mentor is no indicator of their quality mentoring potential. They may be a superintendent or just as easily a cleaner.

Once we have sourced them we need to support and resource them to do what they do well in a more structured format as the guides for our cleanskins.

For example they will be responsible for signing off on all the demonstrated safety KPI's of our cleanskins' log books.

They will be checking in at least every couple of hours and having a daily review with their cleanskin.

They are the ones reporting to the supervisors on our cleanskin's safety development and learning.

At prestarts they will be sharing the cleanskin learnings with the crews and gathering formal 360 degree feedback.

They will be making requests for their cleanskins to sit in on JSA's or the setting up of a drop zone or the filling out of a permit.

They are the ones who make sure their cleanskins ride shotgun on at least one Safety Observation/ Interaction per shift. Not only do the cleanskin's fresh eyes often pick up on overlooked hazards but these activities form a potent, yet informal, learning environment to discuss safety with others more experienced.

The mentors will also be organising the additional theory assessments for the cleanskins. They will be setting the pace of the formal learning, almost like a mini apprenticeship methodology: learning, applying then learning some more and applying that.

The mentors will also work with the Cleanskins in formulating over time their personal Safety Commitment Charter. At the completion and graduation of their mentoring program this is laminated and proudly displayed for all to see.

Lastly the mentors, with the assistance of the Cleanskin Coordinators, will be the ones that tell us when the cleanskins are 'cooked', when they are ready and trusted to be able to work safely.

CTS put a lot of effort in here, sourcing, resourcing, guiding and supporting the mentors in their roles. The future of a site's productivity and the minimising of harm is won or lost in each instant of mentoring. It is worth giving it the attention and focus it deserves. At the workplace we also provide tailored training with lots of real life scenarios and activities. Success for CTS is always about making ourselves redundant and to this end we also encourage the development of on-site mentor networks where they can support each other's issues and development. And we can train up those who excel to become mentors for the mentors. The Cleanskin Coordinators on your site will provide the oil in the machine that is essential to a cleanskin program's success. They are not onsite all the time but ensure the mentoring program is monitored and addressed as required; that all records and assessments are up to date and accessible to all involved.

These are some of the critical commitments required to fulfil our responsibilities to our cleanskins and to get them operating safely and effectively. I strongly urge you to resist the temptation to get cleanskins up and running too quickly. As one cleanskin I was talking to just recently shared with me:

“To be honest, I realise now that I had no idea whatsoever what I was walking into here. Everything in this industry is big, dangerous and has the potential to maim or kill you. Cleanskins like me think they have seen it all before but until they’re actually onsite, eyeing this enormous juggernaut that is mining, they don’t have a clue. It is where the real learning begins”

I hope that you are now convinced that the ‘Emperor of Cleanskin On boarding’ is definitely not wearing any clothes. And that you are also willing to shout it from the highest stock piles. Our current haphazard approach of largely crossing our fingers and hoping for the best means we are all indirectly responsible for putting innocent people directly in harm’s way.

Now, more than ever before, we need a quiet revolution in how we do these things round here. And there is much we can do right here, right now. It’s not either training or learning but a dynamic combination of the best of both, with application and reinforcement playing the larger part. This quantum shift will build strength, resilience and sustainability into our industry. It will also make us distinct employers of choice. But most of all we will be able to sleep soundly at night knowing that we are doing everything we possibly can to look after each other.

The best is yet to come.

Thanks so much for your time.