

## Safety is too important to be wrapped up in regulation!

“There is too much health and safety regulation”!

Have I gone completely mad? Am I jumping on the populist band-wagon of some short-sighted half-wits who endlessly whinge about “*the restrictive monster that is strangling UK business and hampering growth*”? ([The Guardian](#), Thursday 5 January 2012).

I hope not, but I stand by the statement above. Except that what I really meant to say was that there is, sadly, too much **reliance** on regulation. The legal requirements should be the last consideration when it comes to preventing injury and ill-health in the workplace. Anyone with true insight into good business best practice will recognise that not damaging your most valuable asset makes excellent sense. We invest a great deal into this resource by selecting and training them and they continue to gain irreplaceable experience the longer we keep them and look after them.

Even more these days than ever before the reputation of an organisation is central to winning and maintaining the trust of the best customers and employees alike. Providing a safe workplace can be expensive, but only a fraction of the cost of having accidents.

Furthermore there is a moral dimension – surely it just isn’t right to hurt someone. There are very few jobs so important as to justify the death or injury of one of your workforce. Is your line of business really that important?

When there is too much focus on legislation it can be difficult to see beyond the procedures and rules. Employers pass on the legal requirements to their employees. If the company is going to be in trouble with the regulator then they will often be quick to take disciplinary action against the *perpetrator* – usually the last in line, someone who was just doing what they were told or what they thought their manager expected of them. This is the path to blame and retribution, which inevitably results in keeping your head down, staying quiet and a lack of engagement. This is a long way from the *Just Culture* that World Class organisations implement.

The alternative is to focus on the people, their attitudes, values, beliefs and resulting from these – their behaviours. Nobody wants to get injured or see anyone else injured so provide them with the right environment, tools, knowledge, support and motivation and your people will work safely (correctly).

The rules will still be needed for those employees who do not possess the right attitudes and values, but then why do you continue to employ these people? Similarly the legislation will sadly always be required for those employers and their political friends who value their own short-term gain over the safety, health and well-being of those who are grafting on their behalf. These are the “*restrictive monsters*” that need “*slaying*”!