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Serving up safety

Safety - as discussed this month starting on p12 - is an inherent approach to work that all IRTE members, centres and the Society itself must exemplify. Having subject matter experts in our different engineering functions is a measure of our competency; having an inherent sense of safety is a measure of our professionalism.

For me, safety and leadership are synonymous. Note: leadership, not management. Great leadership sees the team being trusted and empowered while working within the bounds of the intent - exactly the environment that fosters safe ways of working. When the team is neither trusted nor listened to, safety is inhibited and risk shoots through the roof. Without feeling part of the company, as active contributors to solutions and success, the team stops thinking. A lack of thought is often cited as an ingredient of failure.

Popularised by Robert Greenleaf, the idea of servant leadership describes a leadership style that seeks to develop others as individuals and as leaders of the future. In doing so, the challenge of daily life and the consideration of safety is owned by individual team members - those closest to the potential point of an accident begin to own the environment. Blame culture disappears.

Servant leadership forms the foundation of most good leaders' approaches - devoid of arrogance or entitlement, guiding without being dictatorial, listening to all voices. As a sample, ask yourself how involved does the most junior member of staff feel? Do they feel listened to? In a complex engineering environment, it may be the youngest engineer on the shopfloor who spots the life-threatening circumstances coming together. Without the confidence to intervene, that junior member of the team may remain silent, and the fatality is unstoppable.

Ask yourself if safety is inherent in your approach to life. One great way to share and reward good practices in our sectors is the Sir Moir Lockhead Safety Award, sponsored by DAF. I encourage you to apply: email daniel.moir@soe.org for more information. Be a safety leader.



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