Effectiveness vs. efficiency – Let's not confuse the two

Management author and guru, Peter Drucker said, *"Efficiency is doing things right. Effectiveness is doing the right thing."* I've always liked this quote, especially when it comes to safety and risk. It sums up where we need to focus our safety culture efforts – doing the right things.

I was chatting with a colleague who directs organizational performance and is a certified six-sigma master black belt – expertise that focuses on maximizing efficiencies. We were comparing our two areas and the natural commonalities between the two. Neither of us were surprised by how much the two circles in our Venn diagram overlapped when it came to process improvement.

The stark difference in severity of outcomes struck us as we discussed efficiency vs. effectiveness. As he put it, "Jon, when processes in my world focus too much on efficiencies over effectiveness, the worst things that happen are we have convoluted business practices, upset customers, and wasting our limited resources. Whereas in your world when efficiencies are emphasized over effectiveness bad things happen – people get hurt and some die. It's the problem of pencil-whipping the checklist – it may seem efficient but it's hardly effective at the outcomes you need – lower risks." He was aware of some of the sad tragedies in academia.

It says something that a non-safety, organizational performance professional would notice this difference as naturally as I did. We spoke the same language despite working in different areas. It's this language that he and I both use – how can we be more effective and achieve the outcomes we desire? The more we concentrate on how we can be effective at lowering risks the more likely we'll have the outcomes we desire – a true culture of safety.

Be effective and strive for the right outcomes.