



# The Human Side of Contractor Safety

Building trust, breaking silos, and preventing serious injuries, together.

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### What We'll Cover Today

## Session Objectives

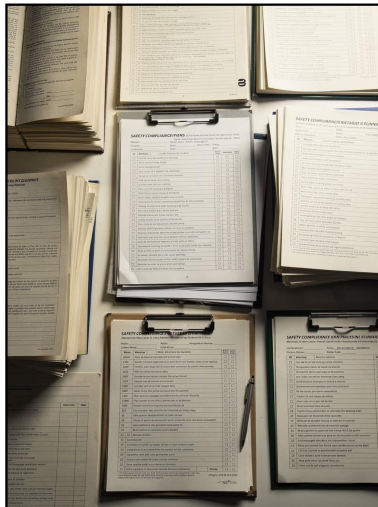
<p>01</p> <hr/> <p><b>Where We Are</b></p> <p>Understand the current state of contractor safety management</p>	<p>02</p> <hr/> <p><b>HOP Thinking</b></p> <p>See how Human and Organizational Performance principles can help</p>
<p>03</p> <hr/> <p><b>A Simple Framework</b></p> <p>Introduce a collaboration model that drives deeper partnership</p>	<p>04</p> <hr/> <p><b>Your Call to Action</b></p> <p>Leave with something concrete you can do where you work</p>

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## Contractor Work

- Multiple Employers**  
Different cultures, incentives, and pressures
- High-Risk & Specialty Work**  
Tasks that demand precision, expertise, and heightened awareness
- Productivity Pressure**  
Schedule and output demands are high, silently competing with safety
- Power Differentials**  
Authority gaps and biases shape how workers speak up or don't

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## Where Contractor Safety Is Now

### Compliance-Based Systems

Safety managed through grading, rules, audits, and checklists

### Lagging Metrics

We measure what already went wrong, not what's about to

### Paperwork Overload

Administrative burden crowds out meaningful safety conversations



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## The Problem Beneath the Programs



### Good Programs Aren't Enough

Programs without connection and trust fail to create true safety



### SIF Events in 2024

Multiple serious injury and fatality events occurred despite strong programs



### Information Gaps

Lessons learned from events are not consistently shared across organizations



### Trust & Authority Gaps

Power differentials silence contractors who see risk but don't feel safe speaking up



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## Challenger: A Contractor Safety Lesson

On January 28, 1986, the Space Shuttle Challenger broke apart 73 seconds after launch. Engineers at a contractor had warned NASA about O-ring failure risk in cold temperatures — but their concerns were overruled and/or not communicated to the right people (Rogers Commission, 1986).

### Information Gap

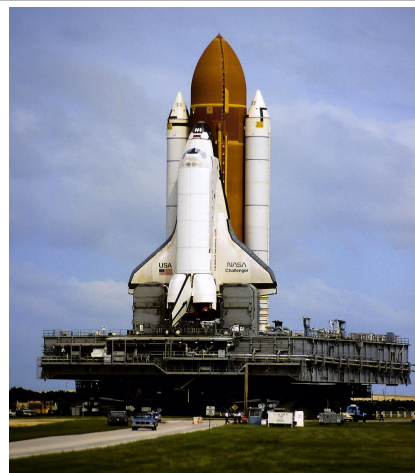
Critical technical warnings did not flow up the decision chain

### Power Differential

Contractor engineers felt pressure to approve the launch despite their own data

### Trust Failure

The relationship between client and contractor did not support honest dialogue



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### HOP PRINCIPLES

## Human & Organizational Performance



### People Make Mistakes

Error is normal — systems must be designed to absorb it



### Blame Fixes Nothing

Punishing individuals doesn't prevent the next event



### Context Drives Behavior

The conditions workers face shape every decision they make



### Learning Is Vital

Organizations that learn from events build resilience over time



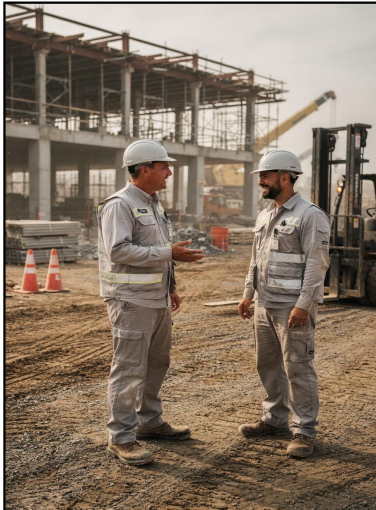
### Leadership's Response Matters

How leaders react to failure determines whether workers speak up next time

(Conklin, 2012)



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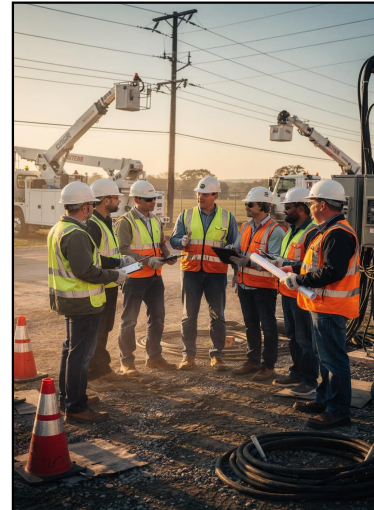


## How HOP Improves Contractor Safety

HOP isn't just an initiative it's a way of thinking and it changes how we plan, lead, visit, and learn.



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## HOP in Action

### Planning & Pre-Job Briefs

Involve contractors in hazard identification before work begins, not just sign-offs. Encourage them to ask, "What's different about this job today than others?" to prompt critical thinking about unique hazards before starting work.



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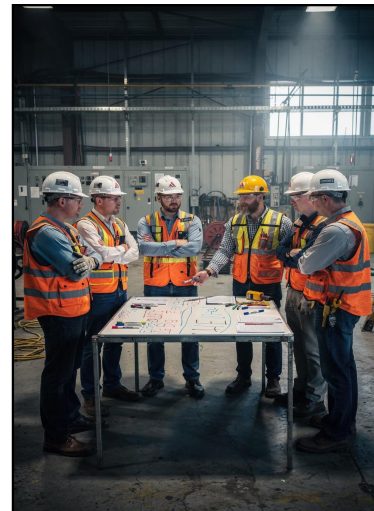
## HOP in Action

### Field Visits & Leadership Presence

Leaders who show up to listen — not inspect — build the trust that surfaces real risk.



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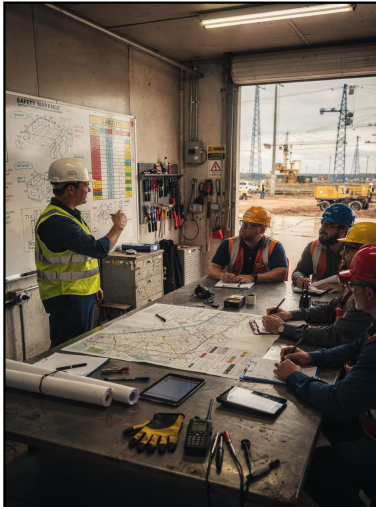
## HOP in Action

### Learning With Contractors

Explore how our systems, work processes, or planning may have contributed to an event by asking better questions together. Shift the focus from blame to understanding by asking, "How can we help?"



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## HOP in Action

### Leadership Decision-Making

HOP-informed leaders ask "what conditions allowed this?" before drawing conclusions.



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## Psychological Safety in Contractor Relationships

Psychological safety is the shared belief that the team (or client-contractor relationship) is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. It means workers and contractors feel safe to speak up, report hazards, and admit mistakes without fear of punishment or humiliation (Rozovsky, 2015; Edmondson, 1999; Frazier et al., 2017).



### Increased Near-Miss Reporting

Workers feel safe to report potential hazards, preventing incidents before they occur.



### Honest Communication

Open dialogue about risks and concerns, fostering transparency and trust.



### Reduced Blame Culture

Focus shifts from 'who' to 'what' and 'how' when incidents happen, promoting systemic fixes.



### Stronger Client-Contractor Trust

Cultivates deeper, more collaborative relationships built on mutual respect.



### Better Learning From Events

Incidents become valuable opportunities for collective improvement and resilience building.



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## Key Research Findings

### Psychological Safety is the #1 Predictor of Team Effectiveness

Google's Project Aristotle study of 180 teams found psychological safety was the most important factor separating high-performing teams from the rest. (Rozovsky, 2015 – *Google re:Work*)

### 2.5x More Likely to Be High-Performing

Teams with high psychological safety are more than twice as likely to perform well. (Rozovsky, 2015; Edmondson, 1999)

### 50% Less Likely to Speak Up When Safety Is Low

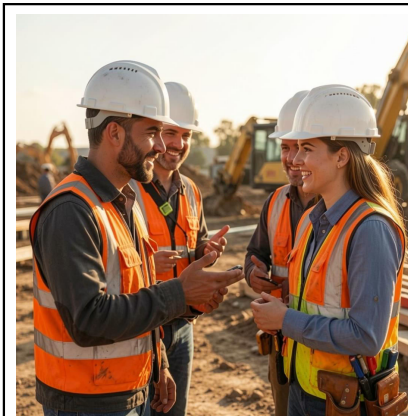
When psychological safety is low, workers are about 50% less likely to report errors and near misses. (Edmondson, 1999)

### Psychological Safety Drives Engagement & Collaboration

Teams with strong psychological safety demonstrate significantly higher engagement and learning behaviors, improving productivity and innovation. (Edmondson, 1999; Frazier et al., 2017)



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## Edgar Schein on Relationships

### Humble Inquiry

"The key to helping is to ask rather than tell — to be curious rather than certain." (Schein & Schein, 2013)

Schein's work teaches us that **genuine curiosity and asking good questions** builds the psychological safety needed for honest dialogue. In contractor relationships, this means approaching partners not as vendors to manage, but as people with knowledge we need.

### Ask, don't tell

Curiosity opens doors that authority closes

### Build before you need

Relationships formed in calm weather survive the storm

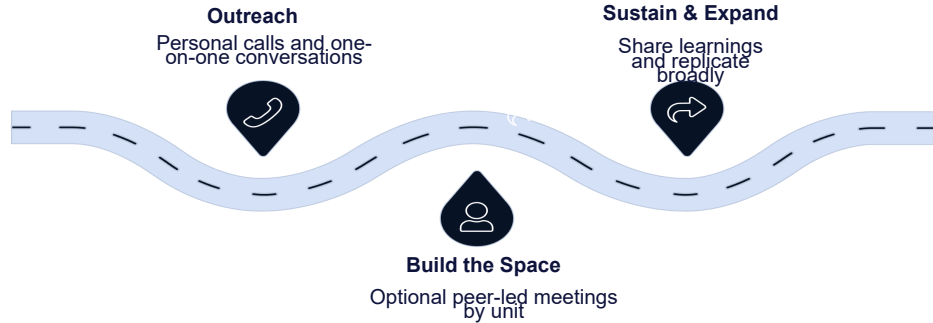


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THE FRAMEWORK

# A Contractor Safety Collaboration Model

Built from the ground up to break down silos, share learning, and prevent serious injuries — together.



The model is simple by design because trust is built in small, consistent actions, not grand programs.

**Agenda/whiteboard**

**WHAT IS THIS?**

Creating a collaborative effort to help eliminate serious injuries and fatalities. And... see where I can help with any utility related questions. And see how we can all learn from each other.

**ANYTHING I CAN HELP WITH?**

**STRUGGLES FROM THE FIELD? WHAT ARE YOUR PEOPLE SAYING? WHAT ARE YOU SEEING?**

**SUCCESSSES? GREAT PROGRAMS? LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES? ANYTHING TO SHARE?**

**THANK YOU!**



## Step 1: Start With a Phone Call

The initiative began with **personal outreach** not a memo and not an email blast. Each source contractor received a direct call to explain the purpose: *we're not sharing enough, and people are getting hurt because of it.*

**One-on-One at First**

Build individual trust before bringing the group together

**Be Transparent**

Name the gap clearly — information isn't flowing and we need to fix that

**Make It Optional**

Voluntary participation signals this is collaboration, not compliance

## Step 2: Create the Space

**T&D Safety Reps**

Monthly collaboration meetings — high attendance, active sharing

**Vegetation & Civil**

Separate operating unit meetings tailored to each group's context

**T&D Operations**

Quarterly meeting expanded to include superintendents and operations managers

**The Format That Made It Work**

Meetings were **contractor-led and peer-driven**. The facilitator's role was to hold the space, not direct the conversation.

- Focus on collaboration, not compliance
- Safe environment for honest dialogue
- SCE shared data and insights in return
- No information used against any contractor

## What Happened When People Gathered

"These are some of the most valuable meetings I've attended. It feels like a true partnership."

— Line Contractor Representative

"We need more of those meetings."

— Helicopter Contractor Representative

### 100% T&D Contractor Representation

Every source T&D contractor represented at operations meetings

### 3 Operating Units

T&D, Vegetation, and Civil each with dedicated collaboration forums

### 3+ Targeted Collaborations

Locate mark, Event Reporting, and Helicopter contractor sessions



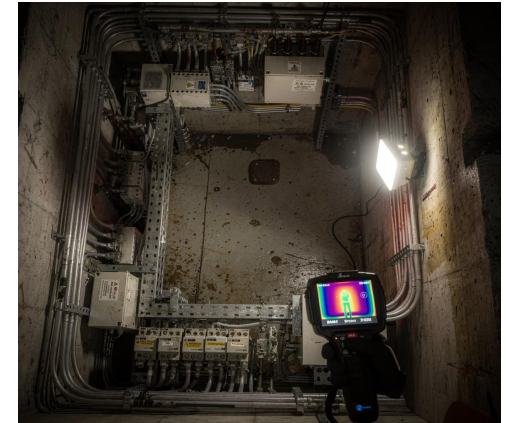
## Learning Spreading in Real Time

### From One Contractor to Many

After a vault flash event, one contractor introduced **thermal imaging alongside heat scanning**. The following month, another contractor reported adopting the same practice.

Near miss and good catch program ideas shared and much more...

- ☐ Safety is not a competition. Nobody wins when someone gets hurt.



## Targeted Collaborations That Moved the Needle

### Locate & Mark Contractor & Digging Contractors

Addressed communication gaps between locating and digging crews — strong indications of reduced mismarked dig-ins on SCE lines

### Event Reporting Contractor Forum

Direct Q&A between the Edison reporting team and all source contractors — improved system understanding and usage

### Helicopter Contractor Safety Forum

Scheduled as a direct action item from a T&D Ops collaboration bringing helicopter and T&D contractors together to address shared safety concerns

Targeted collaborations will look different in every organization. Think any contractors who work together on projects but rarely have a shared space to discuss the 'why' behind what they do. Understanding each other's work makes everyone's job safer and easier.

## The Biggest Barrier: Trust

### No Retaliation, Ever

Made clear: nothing shared would ever be used against a contractor

### Low-Pressure Start

Initial meetings held with only one SCE representative present

### Active Listening

Actively listened, took notes, and followed up with action

### Closed the Loop

Responded to contractor feedback with research and follow up

The relationships that formed are the most significant outcome of this entire initiative.



## Making It the New Normal



### Bring Others In

Two additional Safety Advisors trained to facilitate — ensuring continuity and replication



### Share Upward

Presented at two Safety Leadership meetings



### Expand the Model

Exploring Vegetation and Civil operations meetings; scalable to other AORs

The key to scaling: **start with intentional outreach**. Make the phone calls. Initiate the conversations. Build the trust. The rest follows.



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## Key Takeaways

### Collaboration Fuels Progress

Open dialogue enables field-driven solutions that programs alone cannot deliver

### Peer Learning Is Powerful

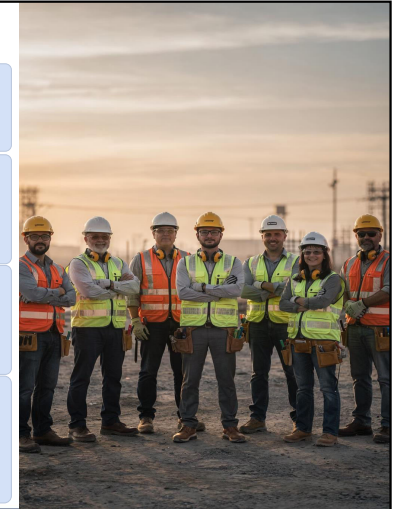
Contractors adopt practices more readily when they come from peers facing the same conditions

### Culture Change Is Measurable

Participation, shared ownership, and cross-adoption of best practices are real indicators of progress

### Safety Isn't a Competition

Owners, clients, and contractors share the goal of preventing SIFs. Working together, not against each other, drives real safety progress.



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## Your Call to Action

You don't need a formal program. You need a phone call and the courage to start.



### If You're an Owner or Client

Do exactly this. Reach out personally to your contractors. Create a voluntary space for shared learning. Make it safe to be honest. The investment is a phone call the return is immeasurable.



### If You're a Contractor

Reach out to your client and encourage them to lead this. If they're not ready, start it yourself. Connect with the other contractors you work alongside. You already have the relationships. Use them.

The goal is simple: work together to prevent serious injuries and fatalities. That work starts with you, today.



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THANK  
YOU

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