



Corporate Integrity and Smart Pigs

An unlikely comparison that makes perfect sense

BY BRAD YARBROUGH

Pigs were in the news recently. No, not like pulled pork or bacon, but so-called smart pigs, which are used by the pipeline industry for safety inspections and cleaning. Pigs help to ensure a pipeline's integrity, and this is critical to environmental protection, public safety and company profitability.

In the article I read, which covered the Pipeline and Energy Expo in Tulsa, Oklahoma, pipeline safety consultant John Godfrey emphasized the important role that pigs play, commenting, "Managing our pipeline integrity has become more important than just our internal business." The article also quoted pigging expert Stephen Miska of TWD Services, Inc., who said, "Pigs are used to detect microscopic cracks and other problems, hopefully before a pipeline fails." As I finished the article, I couldn't help but think about the unavoidable connection between pipeline integrity and the personal integrity of a company's workers. Both are critically important for achieving success.

Breaking it Down

New pipelines are built with materials that have rigid, defined tolerances and specifications. Engineers and construction workers must be diligent to identify the requirements and be certain that the materials used are in strict compliance. Likewise, a company must hire personnel who are capable of successfully protecting its business reputation. Each employee must be thoroughly acquainted with the organization's ethics policies and codes of conduct. Good performance starts with a thorough analysis of the capacity of a pipeline, as well as an individual's ability to satisfy operational expectations.

To identify weaknesses in a pipe, pigs are used to ensure their reliability. The U.S. Department of Transportation requires most lines undergo a pig cleaning every five years. Company leadership must also be willing to continually inspect the organization for vulnerabilities to its integrity. It must hold the line on the behavioral expectations of its staff.

Pigs are also used to remediate. "Pigging essentially keeps the line free of debris and other contaminants that could impede an inspection tool run," Stephen said at the Pipeline Expo. "Debris, if not removed, can accelerate corrosion and increase the chance of failure." In maintaining the soundness of organizational health, it's important that leadership address small issues that can challenge institutional integrity. Allowing small deviations can potentially lead to an accelerated, undesirable shift in a company's character and culture.

Unfortunately, some pipelines do not tolerate pig runs. As a result, they often need to be replaced. Similarly, there are individuals who do not want to be held to high standards and resist adherence to ethical conduct. Efforts to help them have repeatedly failed. Sadly, there are always a few people who will not seize the opportunity to be instructed and make improvements. Replacing them may be inevitable.

Yes, comparing executive and managerial leadership to smart pigs may seem a bit silly. I hope you're laughing, too. But, seriously, the integrity of our people and our organization requires an accountability system that is intentional.

"Failures don't have impacts to just one segment of industry," said John, the pipeline safety consultant. "They tend to impact the broad industry as a whole." So it is with ethics failures, and their inevitable impact. 🌟



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