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مجلس الشرق الأوسط وشمال إفريقيا للترفيه والذهب السياحي  
Middle East and North Africa Leisure & Attractions Council

LET'S TALK SAFETY - DECEMBER 2025

# SMALL ACTS, SAFER DAYS

*Written by Emma Jane Forrest  
Business Development Director,  
Safety Skills Training (SST)*



In life, it is easy to feel confident when tests are passed; audits are marked compliant, paperwork is in order, and all systems meet regulatory expectations. While this is indeed an accomplishment to be proud of, it is only one piece of the safety culture puzzle. Some of the safest-looking operations on paper are the ones most vulnerable in practice, while others with modest systems outperform because safety is not just documented...it is lived.

Across high-risk sectors, from mining to aviation, research consistently shows that the strongest predictor of safety performance isn't the number of procedures in place but is



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rather the culture that shapes how people behave when no one is watching. A 2024 review of high-risk industries found that organisations with strong safety culture demonstrated significantly lower accident rates, even when operating under the same regulatory frameworks as their peers. In contrast, incidents in sectors like mining repeatedly occurred not because systems were absent, but because the culture around using them had eroded over time.



The attractions industry is no different. We rely on human vigilance, communication, and judgement in dynamic environments where conditions change minute by minute. Rides can be engineered, but behaviour can't be programmed, and it is behaviour that determines whether risks are caught early or overlooked.

### Beyond the Rules: What Safety Culture Really Means

Safety culture is sometimes treated as a “soft” concept, but academically it is well defined: the shared beliefs, values, attitudes, and norms that shape how people act in relation to safety. In practice, it shows up in moments that never make it into a manual:



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- A lifeguard who speaks up when their colleague looks tired
- An operator who flags an unusual noise
- A manager who listens without defensiveness when concerns are raised

These micro-behaviours are what separate a compliant operation from a culture-driven one.



### Lessons from Great and Not-So-Great Operations

High-performing teams across hazardous industries have something in common: they create environments where safety is owned by everyone, not imposed from above or devolved to frontlines to handle alone. Studies of leading mining operations show that when leaders prioritise daily conversations, transparent reporting, and continuous learning, incident rates drop dramatically.





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On the other hand, retrospective analyses of accidents often reveal a different pattern: procedures existed, but people felt rushed, unheard, afraid to report issues, or conditioned to normalise deviation. A “checklist mentality” creates an illusion of safety; a “culture of ownership” creates the reality.

In attractions, we've all seen examples: two operations with identical ride systems, but vastly different behaviours. One team moves with calm confidence, communicates constantly, watches each other's blind spots, and speaks up quickly. The other relies on the rules alone. The difference? Culture.

### Leadership Makes or Breaks Safety Culture

Culture is shaped by what leaders pay attention to, reward, and model. When leaders are visible, involved, and consistently reinforcing the message that safety is a value, not a task, teams mirror that behaviour.



This includes:

- Asking for input, not giving orders
- Recognising safe behaviour, not just correcting unsafe behaviour
- Treating near-misses as gifts, not inconveniences
- Maintaining psychological safety: the freedom to speak up without fear

A frontline operator's behaviour is rarely a frontline issue but a reflection of the climate that their leadership creates.



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### From Compliance to Culture: Three Shifts Operators Can Make Today

#### 1. Turn policies into conversations

Procedures are necessary, but they come alive through dialogue. Daily huddles, debriefs and quick “what are we watching for today?” moments build shared awareness.

#### 2. Make near-miss reporting a norm, not an exception

The most successful safety cultures treat near-misses as learning opportunities. Removing blame encourages early intervention which is where accidents are prevented.



#### 3. Build shared ownership, not siloed responsibility

In the strongest cultures, everyone is a safety leader. Empower your team to challenge, question, and collaborate. Create rituals that reinforce this: buddy checks, peer coaching, cross-team shadowing.

### Where We Go from Here

The attractions industry is built on creating exceptional experiences that surprise and delight for years to come. None of that, or the continuing innovations that come, are possible without safety as the foundation. The standard we should aim for isn't “meeting requirements”; but cultivating teams who instinctively do the right thing because it is part of who they are.

When safety becomes a shared value rather than a set of tasks, organisations move from reactive to proactive, from enforcement to engagement, and from compliance to excellence.



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**Emma Jane Forrest**  
*Business Development Director,  
Safety Skills Training (SST)*

**About the Author:** Emma Jane Forrest is the Business Development Director at Safety Skills Training (SST), where she brings strategy, operational delivery, and smart partnerships together to help organisations grow with confidence. With extensive experience across aquatics, attractions, spas, and leisure operations, Emma specialises in turning safety, leadership, and training from "tick-box exercises" into lived, people-driven cultures. A tutor and assessor for MyPT, she has designed and delivered programmes that translate theory into practical, frontline impact. Actively involved with MENALAC and IAAPA Middle East education initiatives, Emma is passionate about developing leaders, empowering teams, and embedding safety as a shared value—not just a requirement.

**Fun fact:** Emma once climbed Mount Kilimanjaro for Dubai Holding (hallucinations included), spends any spare time and money on her four dogs, and still regularly explains to her family that "playing in waterparks" is, in fact, a real job.

**About Safety Skills Training (SST):** Safety Skills Training (SST) is a world-leading provider of aquatic safety training, lifeguard certification, and risk management consultancy for organisations across waterparks, resorts, schools, surf parks, and leisure facilities worldwide. Combining over 100 years of operational experience with internationally recognised programs such as the International Lifeguard Training Program (ILTP®), SST partners with clients in more than 40 countries to help reduce risk, elevate performance, and promote safer guest experiences.