

[Dr. Robert Baron](#) is the President and Chief Consultant of [The Aviation Consulting Group](#). He performs extensive work in his core specializations of Human Factors (HF), Safety Management Systems (SMS), Crew Resource Management (CRM), and Line Operations Safety Audit (LOSA). He consults with, and provides training to, hundreds of aviation organizations on a worldwide basis.

Articles may not be copied, distributed, or used in any way without written permission. Contact Dr. Baron through his [company website](#) for additional information.

Impediments to Reporting

The company's SMS is in place. The reporting system is up and running and employees have been trained about the importance of reporting hazards and unsafe conditions. Yet, during informal interviews with employees, many admit that they have not—and probably will not—use the reporting system. Reasons include:

- “I don't have the time to fill out those reports.”
- “I don't trust management with the reports, even though they claim they are non-punitive and confidential.”
- “I'm sure other people will make the reports.”

As the safety manager, now what do you do? You know the importance of the reports (they are integral to your proactive hazard identification and risk assessment process). Here are some suggestions:

Regarding time, time is a relative thing. People use the excuse that they don't have enough time when, in fact, they might just be trying to say that they are not genuinely interested. Many employees feel that they have nothing to gain from submitting a report. This is mostly attitudinal and can be changed during the training process by explaining to employees the importance of reporting (especially during SMS induction training). Be explicit. Talk about the overall benefit

to not only the company but also to individual employees (they may be preventing their own accident or incident).

Regarding management trust, why is there a lack of trust? Is it *actual* (an employee was fired for submitting a voluntary, “non-punitive” incident report)? Or is it perceived (I just don’t trust management?). If it’s *actual*, it’s a management issue and management needs to make a quick correction to get the trust back. This can be a protracted and arduous process but “talking the talk” and “walking the walk” are absolute management requisites for a successful SMS. If it’s *perceived*, then it’s an employee issue. It’s normal for employees not to trust management. The job, then, is for management to foster a culture of trust. This can be done in a number of ways, but for the most part it involves management commitment to safety, good role modeling, high visibility, and good (open and transparent) communication.

Regarding other people making the reports, this may be due to *pluralistic ignorance*, which means that employees assume that “someone else will take care of it.” This may also be known as *diffusion of responsibility*. When everyone thinks this way then nothing gets done—it becomes an organizational norm. Thus, in training, it would behoove the instructor to discuss these social- psychological phenomena a bit.

Of course there is a lot more to talk about but I just wanted to highlight some of the more common impediments to reporting. Hopefully, management, employees, and trainers will absorb a few good nuggets from this piece and reports will start to increase!