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## SMS Artists

When artists paint on a blank canvas, it gives them an opportunity to start with nothing and creatively turn it into something. This allows the artist to create a picture without having to change or modify a picture that already exists. When implementing a Safety Management System (SMS), most Safety Managers do not have the luxury of starting with a blank canvas; instead, they must overlay the SMS on what could be a very challenging organizational culture—thereby creating chaos, confusion, apathy, and downright resistance. Ideally, it would be nice to start a functional SMS during the genesis of a brand-new business, but usually that doesn't happen.

Therefore, as the Safety Manager, you probably don't have the luxury of starting with a blank canvas. Depending on the current state of your organization's safety culture, you may not have too many issues painting your functional SMS—**or**—you may be confronted with numerous obstacles on the road to painting the perfect SMS picture. These obstacles may include, but are not limited to:

- Lack of management buy-in.
- SMS viewed as a “book on the shelf” rather than an actual, living “safety system.”

- Not enough emphasis on safety risk management (i.e., hazard identification and risk assessment). *This is the core of SMS.*
- Thinking that SMS is a “one shot” rollout and there is no need to continuously monitor and modify the SMS as needed.
- Problems with the voluntary hazard reporting system (employees may be reluctant to report due to fear of reprisal, even though the company Safety Policy, signed by the Accountable Manager, states that employee reporting is non-punitive).

The above are but a few examples of the challenges in attempting to lay down an SMS in an organization which has been around for a long time, which may not have the proper culture to support such a system. It's always easier to start with a blank canvas, but it just may not be possible. So, as the Safety Manager, you have to become somewhat of an SMS artist in trying to figure out the best ways to address these challenges.

Unfortunately, there is no manual to refer to for a clear-cut way to solve these challenges. At a minimum, you should understand at least the basics of organizational behavior, and be charismatic but assertive in trying to attain the goals you are trying to reach.

You may have an uphill battle, but in the end, with the successful implementation of your organization's SMS, you will be proud of the picture you painted!