

[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.*

## **Us and Them**

No, this article is not about a Pink Floyd song—although I must say that is a fine piece of music! Rather, this article is about the dichotomy that oftentimes exists between management and line personnel when it comes to safety culture. Although safety culture may not be easily quantifiable, you can sure see it and feel it when you walk through the hangar. Does what you see give you a warm fuzzy feeling or are you observing an accident waiting to happen? If you are an objective, outside observer it can be easy to make the differentiation; however, if you are close to the situation (i.e., a company employee), you may not actually be able to see the forest through the trees. And, depending on your hierarchical position in the company, your safety culture perception may be further clouded. “Our company has a great safety culture,” says upper-management. “What safety culture?” say the line employees.

In a typical scenario, legitimate safety issues are being reported by line employees but company management counters with responses to the effect of “you’re over-exaggerating the safety issue” or “just deal with it for now...our budget is very tight this year” or “only a few of you are making an issue out of this.” The list could go on and on; I think you get the point. Understandably, management and line employees may very well have completely different perspectives of safety culture. Management may put too much emphasis on *production* at the expense of *protection* and thus become blind (or even negligent) to legitimate safety issues being

reported by line personnel. Numerous accidents have, and will continue to occur, due to this dichotomous perception of safety. This is important, because all of this forms the foundation of your safety culture.

So, if I go to your company and randomly ask employees the question, “how’s your safety culture?,” what do you think the answer will be? It might depend on whom I ask! Management says the culture is terrific. Line employees say it’s just a matter of time before the next accident. Do you see any problems with this?