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# Unknown unknowns: facing uncertainty in the US renewables industry

In a year marked by significant global instability, the rise of safety culture in the renewable energy sector is more crucial than ever. Amidst geopolitical tensions and rising energy demands, organisations like Active Training Team (ATT) are pioneering innovative training programs that emphasise emotional intelligence and workforce safety, ensuring the industry can grow sustainably while prioritising human lives.



It's been said that change is the only constant in life. We have certainly witnessed some sizable global geopolitical shifts in the past year. Conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East have inevitably led to regional instability. The knock-on effects of threats to energy security, rising inflation, and the impact on critical infrastructure have been felt worldwide.

At the time of writing, United States presidential candidate Kamala Harris is just two percentage points ahead of her opponent Donald Trump. With Trump's well-publicised view of renewable energy, neatly encapsulated in his recent rally address in Pennsylvania by the phrase, 'Wind is bullshit!', the sector has a keen eye on the outcome.

Against this landscape, back in July, Active Training Team (ATT) delivered a pilot of a new programme to an invited audience of key players in the wind industry and related sectors in Boston, Massachusetts. Created especially for the American market, Thrive USA is a mobile safety leadership programme, designed to be delivered at hotel conference venues or client facilities nationwide. Though set in a fictional US East Coast port, the structure and methodology deployed closely resembles the award-winning programme that we run out of our Thrive Centre on Humberside in the UK.

ATT's mobile programmes are based on the same sound psychological, neuroscientific, and learning theory principles as those at our centres in London, Huddersfield, Humberside, and Perth in the UK. We blend multimedia and live drama to create a powerful, immersive experience that engages participants at an emotional and intellectual level. This ensures learning is remembered better, and for longer, and positively influences decisions and behaviour in real-world situations.

Businesses constantly look to mitigate risk and focus on the most favourable environments to flourish. So, you might ask the question: Why has ATT chosen now to expand into a market where the political and economic predictors for the near to medium-term future are so uncertain?

**'Until I know this sure uncertainty, I'll entertain the offered fallacy'**

When Shakespeare wrote *The Comedy of Errors*, I'm fairly sure he wasn't thinking about workplace health and safety, but there is much to learn about unpredictability and fluctuating circumstances in this slapstick of a play. Sometimes we have to work with the certainties we do have and use what we know to be immutable facts.

As co-founder and a director of ATT, I've been working with organisations managing multi-billion-pound projects for over 15 years and I know our clients recognise that there is a sound business case for making safety a key part of their company strategy.

The human cost aside, we are all well aware of the economic and reputational impact of a fatality or serious on-site injury.

An analysis of 32,061 construction sites across New York City conducted by the Harvard Business Review in 2023, found that mandatory safety training reduces worker injury rates by 15% to 18%, delivering \$18 million in annual savings and a 42% return on investment.

A second longitudinal study of 1,921 industrial facilities of a major oil-field services company showed that a 10% increase in monthly training hours led to a 6.5% to 10% reduction in employee safety hazards over 128 months.

Making safety a driver of business performance can give companies a competitive advantage. It can be a key selling point for B2B and B2C purchasing decisions and also a factor in recruitment and retention leading to better productivity and business continuity.

The UK's Health and Safety Executive (HSE) statistics for 2023/24 show that there were 138 workplace fatalities in the UK. In the US, there were 5,486 workplace fatalities in 2022. That's the equivalent of one death every 96 minutes and a rate per 100,000 workers of 5.2 compared to 0.8 in the UK.

Enforcing rules, investigating incidents, and conducting procedural training are part of the picture in reducing rates of injury and worse. At ATT we focus on workplace culture,

behaviour change, and ensuring everyone within an organisation has the communication skills to successfully challenge anything they believe to be unsafe and to accept challenges graciously.

**'The whole future lies in uncertainty: live immediately'**

The Global Offshore Wind Health and Safety Organisation, known as G+, reported 1,679 safety incidents in 2023. The reported incidents reflected a 94% increase from 2022; alarming until we consider the additional 17.3 million hours worked by the industry in that year. Offshore wind has seen significant growth in recent years, and we can expect health and safety performance will come under increasing pressure.

You don't have to be a Stoic like Seneca to appreciate the importance of living in the present, but we can learn valuable lessons from the past. After several high-profile disasters such as Piper Alpha and Deepwater Horizon, the oil and gas industries have significantly 'cleaned up their act'. Ensuring the renewable energy industry can be productive and sustainable and put the safety of its workforce at its heart is a challenge.

Larger turbines, more remote sites, and new technologies all present risk in a rapidly expanding industry. But if technology is changing at a pace, it's probably also true that broadly speaking, human nature changes very little. So, we already know a lot about mitigating risk in any industry, because we know a lot about human behaviour.

I believe there are lessons for our Stateside colleagues developing the burgeoning US renewables industry to take from Europe, where the offshore wind sector has been operating for over 30 years and at scale.

The political landscape of the United States might currently seem uncertain, but it's unlikely a change of administration can halt the journey to renewable energy entirely. Significant investments are currently being made in solar energy and onshore and offshore wind and a favourable economic climate is likely to be the main driver of future investment.

This spring and summer in California, solar farms and wind turbines have supplied more than 100% of the state's electric needs for long stretches; there are now enough batteries on the grid that they have become the biggest source of power at night. Meanwhile, Texas is expected to outpace California by completing 6.4 gigawatts of new grid battery capacity by the end of the year,

Last month, our New York City-based team delivered the first 'live' Thrive USA programme. This was for Community Offshore Wind, a JV between RWE and National Grid. Feedback from those attending was phenomenally positive.

I was interested to read the words of the Director of the Directorate of Standards





ATT's team based in New York City

and Guidance for the US regulatory and enforcement agency, OSHA, Andrew Levinson, in a presentation at the 2024 NSC Safety Congress & Expo. He said: 'We recognise that we can't get what we need out of safety and health programs without talking about safety culture.'

'When we talk about safety, it's not usually what's going on in the workplace that motivates people. It's, 'I want to get home to my wife, to my kids, to my husband, to my parents or to my loved ones.' There are some really gut-wrenching stories. The statistics matter, but they're not the story.'

ATT operates globally. Companies are increasingly realising the value of emotional intelligence, psychological safety and good non-technical skills in helping, not just to keep their people safe, but to boost workforce retention and drive productivity. Studies by the OSHA indicated that for every \$1 invested in construction safety programmes, there is an average ROI of \$5 as illness, injuries and fatalities decline.

That the world will come increasingly to rely on renewable energy is certainly not a fallacy. In the United States, there is a prescient opportunity for the industry, not just to mitigate operational risk, but to invest in a sector-wide safety culture that sets a gold standard and delivers on the bottom line.

🌐 [www.activetrainingteam.us](http://www.activetrainingteam.us)



#### About Dermot Kerrigan

Dermot Kerrigan is the cofounder and director of Active Training Team (ATT).

ATT is an award-winning team of professional writers, trainers, facilitators, actors, psychologists and digital learning specialists which enables organisations across the world to achieve the highest levels of safety performance.

#### Feedback from the Thrive USA programme

'The training was exceptionally well executed, and in a unique format that made active and engaged listening far more accessible than a two-hour address or slide deck. I've never participated in a session like this before, but I can already tell it will stick with me! Thank you all for a GREAT session!'

'Great presentation, almost cried and really touched; the content was very relevant and engaging.'

'It was excellent training and very interactive. Definitely the most impactful work training I have taken to date.'

'Very good job making this US-relevant. Even something as simple as making sure people in the video and in the room have American accents increases the relatability of the message. We have too many trainings which seem copy/paste from Europe and not fit to our location. Excellent portrayal of union labour.'