



# The 2024 CEOs Who “Get It”

**S**afety has changed so much over the years. From new technologies to previously unheard-of concepts and ideas, what safety is and means has shifted over time. But no matter how we define safety, we will always need leaders working to maintain it as a guiding value for their organizations. That’s what it means to be a CEO who “gets it.”

This year’s honorees have proven their adaptability and openness to new ideas and solutions. Across industries and around the globe, they have emphasized worker well-being, encouraged employees to use their voices and made safety the top corporate value – no matter what.

These seven CEOs are not afraid to challenge the status quo. They don’t compromise when it comes to safety because they understand that by doing things safely, they are keeping people healthy and saving lives.

A CEO who “gets it” knows safety leadership must start at the top. **Bob Pragada**, with Jacobs, has driven his company to emphasize the importance of psychological safety, creating a safe space for the entire workforce by sharing his own mental health experiences. **Manjiv Vohra** leads ECC, a global remediation and construction company, in a “whole self” safety program that targets physical and mental health as well as work-life balance.

A strong leader also preserves the value of safety for all types of workers. They know everyone, regardless of status, deserves to make it home at the end of the day. Take **Delaine Fowler** of Accelerate Therapy and Performance, who has helped prevent injuries by placing physical therapists and athletic trainers in workplaces. Similarly, **Lt. Gen. Scott Spellmon** of the U.S. Army Corps of Engi-

neers included contractors and partners as he developed and implemented a safety and occupational health management system that has become the standard across the entire Army.

At AtkinsRéalis US Nuclear, **Jim Rugg** is involved in safety every step of the way, participating in safety walkarounds, encouraging employees to speak up about safety concerns and personally recognizing safety award winners.

Finally, a CEO who “gets it” always has safety top of mind. **Greg Hass** of Valley Construction Co. has a motto that reveals the depth of his commitment: “No expense is too high when it comes to lives and safety.” By establishing a safety council and adopting a safety-first mindset, **Robert Pyle**, with Graham Packaging Co., has fostered a culture where every employee values safety above all else.

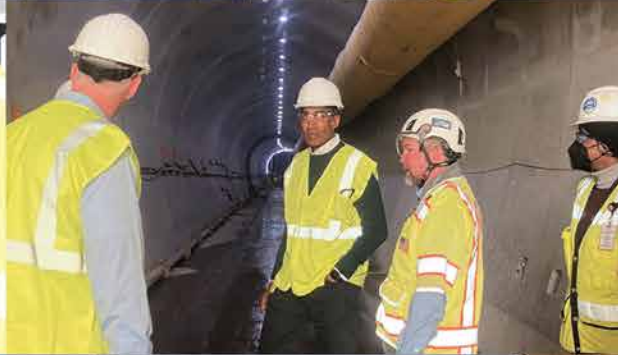
By finding new solutions, creating stronger cultures and engaging workers, these seven exceptional leaders have made people safe – and saved lives. Their dedication to the value of safety is truly inspiring.

On behalf of the National Safety Council, congratulations to all the 2024 honorees. **S+H**



**Lorraine M. Martin**  
President and CEO  
National Safety Council





**Does your CEO 'get it' about worker safety and health?**

The 2025 CEOs Who "Get It" nomination period is open. Tell us why your CEO deserves this honor: [bit.ly/3SbQr2m](https://bit.ly/3SbQr2m)





## DR. DELAINE FOWLER, DPT

PRESIDENT AND CEO  
ACCELERATE THERAPY AND PERFORMANCE  
SALISBURY, NC

*Accelerate Therapy and Performance is a pioneering firm specializing in injury prevention consulting and physical therapy. The firm collaborates with corporations to significantly reduce injury rates by serving as frontline health care providers, specifically addressing work-related stress. Through its dual model of care and coaching, Accelerate Therapy and Performance aims to decrease workplace injuries and enhance employee satisfaction and retention.*

### **Describe your personal journey to becoming a CEO who “gets it.”**

My journey toward becoming a leader who “gets it” has been enlightening and challenging. Early in my career, I observed a significant gap in how employers approached employee well-being. Traditional models often saw human resources and safety departments working in silos, rarely leveraging insights and communications from their most valuable asset – the employees themselves.

My pivotal realization occurred while serving as a consultant in response to significant workplace injuries. Clients sought advice on ergonomic adjustments post-incident, but I recognized a more profound need: a proactive, knowledgeable health care approach that understands workplace movements akin to athletic movements. This insight led to the development of programs focusing on individual employee wellness

rather than just production metrics. Our ethos centers around the belief that happy, healthy employees are safer, more engaged and more productive.

However, my path to leadership was more than just defined by focused passion. Embracing the adage that “leaders are made, not born,” I transformed my small PT practice – founded in 2008 – into what Accelerate is today. It wasn’t until 2016 that we crystallized our values, vision and mission, marking a turning point in our journey. From just six employees in 2016, we’ve grown to over 90 this past year. This growth is a testament to aligning our hiring and operational strategies with our core values.

Leadership at Accelerate isn’t about top-down directives; it’s about nurturing a culture in which every team member aligns with our mission.

In our leadership meetings, the atmosphere is electric, with energy and commitment. My team brings forward opportunities and solutions, not problems and demands.

This culture has been pivotal in achieving our goal of reducing workplace injuries while enhancing employee satisfaction and retention.

In summary, my journey to becoming a CEO who “gets it” was shaped by recognizing the need for a holistic, proactive approach to employee well-being; aligning our organizational mission with our everyday practices; and fostering a leadership culture that values solutions and alignment with our core values. This journey has not been just about personal growth but also about creating a sustainable, positive impact in the realm of workplace health and safety.



Read the full Q&A  
at [bit.ly/3TPpG5c](https://bit.ly/3TPpG5c).

### **NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Exemplified her commitment to safety by taking the initiative to solve a known problem and being intentional in her efforts (i.e., aligning professional support – physical therapists and certified athletic trainers. Bringing these resources together made a greater impact, as did partnering with employers to educate their employees).
- Was bold enough to explore new partnerships that expanded a way to prevent and educate employers and employees on workplace injuries.
- Began collaborating with companies to support them in educating their employees on a better way to work to prevent a lifetime of pain and suffering caused by multiple surgeries. The collaboration with companies was a step further, not only to support a safe work environment but also to provide relief to employees who have to continue to work after suffering injuries.



## GREG HASS

**PRESIDENT  
VALLEY CONSTRUCTION CO.  
ROCK ISLAND, IL**

*Valley Construction was founded in 1925 in Davenport, IA, as a small gravel sidewalk construction company. Nearly 100 years later, the company has ventured into large scale heavy civil construction. Valley performs interstate asphalt and concrete paving, underground water and sewer utilities, commercial and industrial buildings, demolition, and earthwork. It also specializes in construction in the nuclear and railroad industries.*

### ***Describe your personal journey to becoming a CEO who “gets it.”***

My journey to becoming a CEO who “gets it” has been an ongoing process of learning and growing. It began when I was first hired at the company, where I quickly realized that safety was not a core value in our industry. Even within our own company we experienced numerous preventable incidents and fraudulent claims that caused costly losses. As I worked my way up from being a field worker, I noticed unsafe practices and watched other workers get hurt. Later in my career, when I was in upper management, our industry was experiencing a high rate of serious or fatal incidents in our same geographical work area. Luckily, it didn’t include any of our employees. At my direction, our company switched to a proactive approach. We jumped in with both feet and hired a safety professional to cut – and work toward eliminating – any future losses and to, hopefully, prevent any injuries or a loss of life.

My understanding of safety grew more as I worked with our new safety manager to develop policies and procedures that would ensure everyone went home safely and in one piece each day. We also worked to totally revamp and change our culture into a safety-first mindset. Eventually, we formed a safety committee with members from a broad range of company departments and work types to help give us a second set of eyes on our program and get complete buy-in. With the implementation of our safety programs and prevention, we’ve gone from being a firm with a high rate of incidents to virtually zero incidents year after year.

### ***What’s the biggest obstacle to safety at Valley Construction?***

Our subcontractors and suppliers are an integral part of our construction projects, but it’s not always guaranteed that they’ll adhere to the safety practices we advocate for. Trying to find companies to contract with that follow our core safety values sometimes can be an obstacle to our safety milestones and goals. To ensure compliance with OSHA and American National Standards Institute guidelines, as well as our own safety regulations, we’ve incorporated provisions into all our subcontracts requiring strict adherence to these standards. Despite this measure, complacency can be a concern with these companies that are not 100% safety driven.

To address this issue effectively requires more than just contractual agreements; it necessitates consistent reinforcement of safety protocols through reminders, coaching sessions and pre-project planning meetings where expectations are clearly outlined prior to commencement. In addition to these measures, we also make sure that everyone involved in each project knows our strict stance and commitment to safety. Unsafe workers – and even companies – who don’t want to follow our protocols and “work safe” mentality are also removed from our jobsites.

  
Read the full Q&A  
at [bit.ly/3TPpG5c](https://bit.ly/3TPpG5c).

### **NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Personal motto is, “No expense is too high when it comes to lives and safety.” Lives this motto by supporting his supervisors and field employees with annual and ongoing training.
- Leads the safety culture with a top-down approach to safety and health.
- Valley Construction has been recognized by numerous organizations for its exceptional safety and health record.



## BOB PRAGADA

CEO  
JACOBS  
DALLAS, TX

*With approximately \$16 billion in annual revenue and a talent force of more than 60,000, Jacobs provides a full spectrum of professional services, including consulting, technical, scientific, and project delivery for the government and private sector. Jacobs helps make the world smarter, more connected and more sustainable, supporting better outcomes for critical infrastructure, advanced manufacturing, cities and places, energy and environment, health and life sciences, national security, and space.*

### **Describe your personal journey to becoming a CEO who “gets it.”**

Safety leadership has defined my 33-year career, from my service as a Naval officer beginning in 1990 to my current role as Jacobs’ CEO. During my time in the Navy, I led teams responding to devastating crises where I was able to hone values such as caring for others, building resilience and leading from the trenches – things that shaped my leadership approach and style forever. My commitment to safety was further solidified as the facilities director for Camp David, where my remit was to safeguard the security of the president and his family.

These personal values would go on to shape my leadership as a civilian. Since joining Jacobs in 2006, I’ve consistently fostered a people-first culture of engagement – “walking the talk” on safety – and played a central role in developing our industry-leading Beyond

Zero Culture of Caring. At the core, my approach is a steadfast emphasis on the essential role that leaders at all levels play in fostering a culture of genuine engagement.

Improving safety and well-being requires collective commitment, resources and expertise – what I like to call “the power of we.” In setting an example, we always open our global town hall meetings with a Culture of Caring safety message as a reminder that the success of our company depends on our individual personal involvement with safety. My passion for partnering with organizations such as the National Safety Council, clients, supply-chain vendors and competitors alike is a testament to our mission of making our world a safer, healthier place and ensuring the focus on safety and well-being remains at the backbone of our company strategy.

  
Read the full Q&A  
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### **Why is safety a core value at Jacobs?**

It’s been a foundational core value going back to Joe Jacobs, the founder of our company, and his philosophy that “if you can’t lead safety, you can’t lead.” Even though we had an existing strong foundation and reputation, we wanted to be great. So, in 2007, we launched our Beyond Zero Culture of Caring initiative, which is our approach to the health, safety and security of our people; the protection of the environment; and the resilience of our organization – reaching beyond the boundaries of the workplace and into our homes and the communities we serve. Continually nurtured and reinforced over the past 16 years, that mindset is now engrained in our DNA and remains a guiding principle in our overall company strategy and how we respond during major events and crises.

### **NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Understands the link between mental health and safety. Openly shares his own mental health experiences, creating a safe space for Jacobs’ workforce.
- Was a key driver of “creating and maintaining a psychologically and physically safe and healthy work environment” as a central element of Jacobs’ CEO EHS policy statement.
- As Jacobs’ first military veteran and CEO of color, he’s been a tireless campaigner for inclusion. He’s an active member of Jacobs’ eight employee networks and speaks out on the issues of human rights, racial and LGBTQ+ equality, and veterans’ rights.
- Always opens global town hall meetings with a safety moment and a reminder that “the success of our company depends on our individual personal involvement with safety.”





## BOB PYLE

**PRESIDENT AND CEO  
GRAHAM PACKAGING  
LANCASTER, PA**

*A worldwide leader in the design, manufacturing and sale of technology-based, customized rigid plastic containers, Graham Packaging provides safe, attractive and sustainable packaging for a variety of industry-leading consumer brands. Founded in 1970, Graham Packaging got its start converting the metal oil can into the first plastic motor oil container. Since then, the organization has expanded into other packaging categories, including food and beverage, home care, and industrial. Headquartered in Lancaster, PA, with a flagship manufacturing facility in nearby York, Graham Packaging produces approximately 16 billion containers annually across nearly 65 plants in North America, Europe and South America.*

### ***Describe your personal journey to becoming a CEO who “gets it.”***

The most transformative experience for me was as a plant manager in the heavy manufacturing industry. I saw those people face to face every day and was directly responsible for them. I still feel personally responsible for the safety of every single person at Graham Packaging. I’ve done business in more than 30 countries, and you see different stages of the safety journey – the good and the bad. Among all our priorities at Graham, the well-being of our people is paramount.

### ***Why is safety a core value at Graham Packaging?***

“Safety first” is a core value at Graham and ties into our strategic pillar of “Our people are our greatest

competitive advantage.” We have integrated safety into our culture to ensure it becomes an intrinsic part of our operations, guiding decision-making at all levels. We fundamentally believe that everyone deserves to return home safe each day and that every employee has a responsibility to themselves and to each other to ensure that our whole team stays safe.

### ***What’s the biggest obstacle to safety at Graham Packaging?***

The biggest obstacle to safety at any company is complacency. To overcome it at Graham, we prioritize continuous training, engage employees in safety discussions and conduct regular safety audits. More importantly, however, we foster a “safety first” culture that encourages learning and reporting, ensuring a proactive approach to addressing potential hazards and building a workplace where everyone looks out for each other. We believe that if we do the right things, all incidents are preventable. We are continuously working toward a “target zero” goal of no incidents.

 **Safety+Health**  
ONLINE  
Read the full Q&A  
at [bit.ly/3TPpG5c](https://bit.ly/3TPpG5c).

### ***How do you instill a sense of safety in employees on an ongoing basis?***

Our Safety First, Quality Focused initiative is a vital part of who we are at Graham. We cultivate a “safety first” mindset through ongoing training, communication and recognition of safe behaviors. Open dialogue, commitment from leaders and empowering employees to actively participate in safety initiatives all create a collective commitment to a secure work environment.

### **NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Has set the gold standard by fostering a culture in which safety isn’t merely a checkbox but an ingrained value that each employee must embrace. His call to “lead with safety” has resonated profoundly, permeating the core of the organizational fabric.
- Established the Executive Safety Council – a testament to his commitment to instilling safety at the highest levels of operations – and championed the adoption of a safety moment at the onset of every meeting, a seemingly simple practice that is now a cultural cornerstone woven into everyday interactions.
- His holistic approach underscores that his commitment to safety isn’t just a solitary endeavor – it’s a partnership, a collaborative pursuit shared by every member of the organization. This unity has brought about tangible change that touches lives and safeguards futures.



## JIM RUGG

**PRESIDENT  
ATKINSRÉALIS US NUCLEAR  
OAK RIDGE, TN**

*AtkinsRéalis is one of the world’s most respected design engineering and project management consultancies. Its US Nuclear Sector is a leading provider of specialized, technology-based, facility-cleared and other nuclear services to government customers, with strengths in nuclear operations, process design engineering, waste management and high-level waste technologies. For more than 27 years, AtkinsRéalis US Nuclear and its predecessor companies have solved some of the Department of Energy and National Nuclear Security Administration’s toughest cleanup and decommissioning challenges.*

### **Describe your personal journey to becoming a CEO who “gets it.”**

My journey to becoming a CEO is quite unique. My early career began in environmental, safety and health, where I learned leadership principles and how to positively influence the right behaviors. This position set the stage for how I wanted to lead teams. Through this experience, I learned that to be successful, you must be present every day and have meaningful conversations with every member of the team. Some of the most hazardous parts of the job are when people are left to decide what to do on their own. I built a foundation that incorporates the ideas of others to build a strong safety culture. I was the project manager when we achieved over 28 million hours without a lost-time injury. My leadership team and I focused on being in the field, observing, listening

and doing everything we could to enable success for our workforce.

A CEO who “gets it” must also possess certain qualities and attributes. I had to be a strategic thinker with a clear vision, hold strong leadership and people skills, and prioritize building high-performing teams while fostering a positive company culture.

I learned the hard-earned skills of resilience and adaptability from setbacks that developed my ability to persevere in the face of challenges. My personal journey taught me to embrace failure and that taking calculated risks is vital for innovation and growth to an individual and to an organization. Ethical leadership is crucial, and I learned to prioritize ethical decision-making and consider the impact of my actions on stakeholders.

Additionally, my commitment to continuous learning and self-improvement was key for me to be an effective leader. Effective leadership means understanding the value of empathy and emotional intelligence in building strong relationships with employees, customers and business partners. I believe that giving back to the community is a social responsibility and should be a big part of the company’s mission.

Finally, although being a CEO often requires significant dedication, CEOs who “get it” understand the importance of maintaining a healthy work-life balance to avoid burnout and set a positive example for their employees. Everyone must take time to revive and recover in order to thrive.

  
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### **NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- In every meeting, initiates discussions on safety, quality and integrity, and actively contributes to the planning and execution of safety-related activities and initiatives.
- Regularly visits projects to ensure the safe and effective execution of work. During these onsite visits, actively participates in safety walkarounds and engages in the Behavior Interaction Program, established to foster engagement between management and employees in daily activities with the goal of improving safety performance.
- Values openness and transparency, and fosters an environment that promotes open communication, where employees feel comfortable reporting safety concerns, incidents, and instances of good catches or near misses. To facilitate this, has established a dedicated link and email address called “Ask Jim,” which is accessible to all employees.



## LT. GEN. SCOTT SPELLMON

COMMANDING GENERAL,  
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS  
55TH CHIEF OF ENGINEERS, U.S. ARMY  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

*Our mission is to deliver public and military engineering services and partners to strengthen our nation's security, energize the economy and reduce risks from disasters. The Army Corps' major programs include civil works, military programs, and research and development. The civil works mission is to provide quality, responsive service to the nation and includes water resource development activities. USACE consists of 36,000 civilians and 800 military personnel stationed across the United States and in 130 other countries, providing reimbursable engineering expertise to the nation and throughout the world.*

### **Describe your personal journey to becoming a leader who “gets it.”**

Safety is ingrained in the U.S. Army and in all our leadership development programs. We are taught the importance of safety in all that we do, from our time as second lieutenants to our time as lieutenant generals. In the early years of my career, I saw firsthand the profound influence a safety-oriented culture can have on both an organization's success and its most valuable asset: its people.

Today, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is working to deliver its highest-ever workload in our 249-year history, and I was not proud of our safety performance during my first year as the chief of engineers. We were inconsistent in our application of safety basics on our many worksites across the globe.

We collectively had to reinforce that safety isn't merely a checkbox, but a foundational element of effective leadership. As leaders, we must set conditions for success, which we define as safely delivering quality projects on time and within budget. If we're not safe, we're not meeting our mission.

### **Why is safety a core value at USACE?**

Safety is a core value at USACE because we are about *people*. We owe it to our workforce to take care of them, and we owe it to our contractors to make sure they can go home and have dinner with their families. We recognize the well-being of our employees is paramount to our success. Beyond regulatory compliance, we view safety as a moral imperative and a strategic investment. A safe workplace not only protects our team members but enhances productivity, employee morale and our reputation as a responsible and caring organization.



Read the full Q&A  
at [bit.ly/3TPpG5c](https://bit.ly/3TPpG5c).

### **How do you instill a sense of safety on an ongoing basis?**

We instill a sense of safety through a multifaceted approach. I consistently convey the significance of safety to my leaders every week through a reoccurring and real-time incident and injury dashboard. I've established the framework and provided motivation for leaders to implement and embrace a safety and occupational health management system. This initiative has notably changed our culture of safety, enhanced leader engagement and empowered employees to proactively identify and address potential hazards. Leading by example and integrating safety into our everyday operations reinforce the message that safety is not just a priority but a shared responsibility.

### **NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Was responsible for leading the development and implementation of the U.S. Army's most successful safety and occupational health management system, which is now the blueprint for SOH management system implementation across the entire Army.
- Established a pioneering occupational health delivery system, which included hiring many new occupational health nurses and industrial hygienists, to ensure proper care is provided and resources are deployed where they're most needed.
- Modernized the collection, analysis and display of SOH data, facilitating the quick identification of patterns, issues and opportunities, and enhancing safety strategic planning.





## MANJIV S. VOHRA, PE, DBIA

PRESIDENT AND CEO

ECC

BURLINGAME, CA

*Founded in 1985, ECC delivers construction, environmental remediation, contingency and disaster response, energy, munitions response, development, and fuels infrastructure solutions to solve its clients' toughest challenges worldwide. ECC has successfully executed more than \$13 billion in award-winning projects in 37 countries. Its professionals are in offices throughout North America, Europe, Asia/Pacific and Africa.*

### **Describe your personal journey to becoming a CEO who “gets it.”**

I have worked my entire career at ECC, joining straight from graduate school as a project engineer 36 years ago. I learned operations in environmental remediation and construction firsthand, and was very fortunate to have seasoned superintendents and safety officers who mentored me in regulations and best practices, from general housekeeping, heat/cold stress and AHAs to chemical risks and transportation of hazardous waste. A key part of safety for our projects in post-conflict areas is security. I personally led our construction and munitions program in Iraq in 2004-2005 and learned firsthand from excellent mentors the best practices and discipline required to ensure our people's security. When my career progressed to more senior oversight roles, I felt confident in knowing safety from the field perspective, and it allowed me to listen to and support our field staff so they could run a safe operation on every site.

### **What's the biggest obstacle to safety at ECC?**

Our clients trust us to solve tough challenges in difficult and extreme environments, such as post-disaster projects (e.g., California wildfires, Superstorm Sandy); hazardous, radiological or contaminated sites that require special safety measures to protect our workers and the public; clearing munitions and explosives of concern in civilian and post-conflict areas; or operating on remote or logistically challenging locations. Unlike industrial production, every project has a start and a finish, and typically has a newly formed team of managers, staff and subcontractors.

  
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Job No. 1 for every project is to ensure all members are aligned on safety. We pre-screen subcontractors at the bidding stage for safety, then reinforce safety practices with selected subcontractors at the project kickoff stage. All project personnel are required to read, understand and sign off on the project health and safety plan, and we use a lot of positive reinforcement, particularly early on in each project, to help the team coalesce around safety.

### **How does ECC measure safety?**

We use industry-standard metrics (DART, OSHA recordables, etc.); they're useful for benchmarking, but are mostly lagging indicators of performance. We use many leading indicators: cross-functional safety audits, incident reporting, analysis (erstwhile “near misses”), safety improvement ideas (“ECCOSLIP”) and Good Catch programs. We track data via our in-house PowerBI Platform to identify trends and implement proactive programs to target areas of concern. The analysis is “live” and available to employees on our intranet.

### **NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Recognizes that a happy, healthy and productive workforce means an integrated safety approach that extends into personal wellness. Programs, also extended to family members, target physical and mental health while encouraging life-work balance.
- Creates customized safety programs of which employees take ownership. Employees actively engage in safety through training, committees, programs/contests, lessons learned and industry events.
- Insists that subcontractors meet rigorous safety standards. Project managers lead kickoff meetings with subcontractors and ensure training and resource availability. Fully invested in safety, subcontractors participate in initiatives such as OSHA Voluntary Protection Program audits.