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Safety Is Cool? Yes, and Valuable Too, Digital Realty Says



The iMasons Legacy Podcast
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Safety Is Cool? Yes, and Valuable Too



Driving Safety Forward

Success in Formula 1 car racing includes everything from tire strategies and pace management to pit crew training and rest breaks between races to ensure team members stay healthy throughout the season.

“They care about their people. They think about winning. They redesign. They practice. They have the right people in the right place at the right time,” said Benjamin Legg, Global Vice President of Health and Safety at [Digital Realty](#), who takes inspiration from well-run Formula 1 teams.

“All of this is about creating as safe an outcome as you possibly can and being prepared if failure occurs,” he added.

At Digital Realty, Legg is driving a transformation of health and safety from being a priority to being a source of value embedded in the company that increases efficiency and productivity safely.

The company’s Safely Powering Progress strategy centers on creating genuine engagement with health and safety from the boardroom to the frontline where colleagues build, operate and maintain infrastructure. These are colleagues who are on site every day. They understand how work is done safely and the challenges they face when work does not go to plan and they have to adapt.

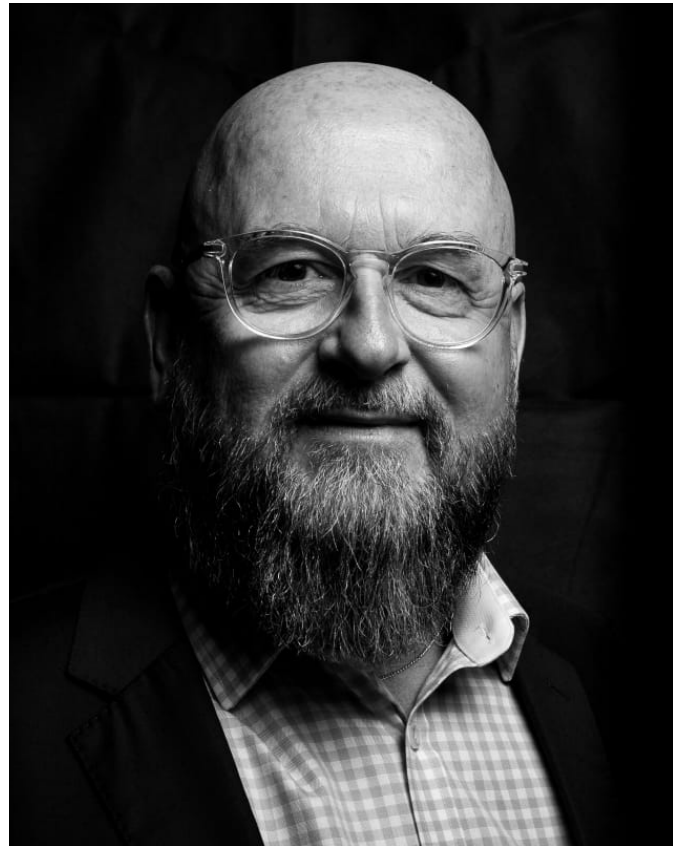


Photo courtesy of Digital Realty

“Why can’t safety be exciting? Why can’t it be fun? Why can’t it be transformative?”

— Benjamin Legg,
Global VP of Health and Safety,
Digital Realty



**At Digital Realty,
health and safety is
transforming from being
a priority to being a
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increases efficiency and
productivity — safely.**

“If you have to adapt and find a workaround, you’ve potentially not got the right system or design or process or project plan, whatever it might be,” said Legg. “Something’s wrong.”

The only way to learn about these challenges is to bring eyes, ears and curiosity to the frontline. Legg is harnessing both human centered engagement and modern digital tools to collect the insights needed to understand and transform how work is done.

For example, he and executives routinely visit project sites and engage colleagues with open-ended questions – what Legg calls “better questions” – about how to make their jobs more efficient and safer, and what does and does not work. The company is also trialing digital tools that share information on safe practices, collect data on work conditions and streamline reporting of issues.

The goal is to take health and safety “from being slightly negative and compliance-driven to something that is innovative, engaging, dare I say quite cool,” Legg said. “Why can’t safety be exciting? Why can’t it be fun? Why can’t it be transformative? Why can’t it be the catalyst for change? That’s my challenge.”

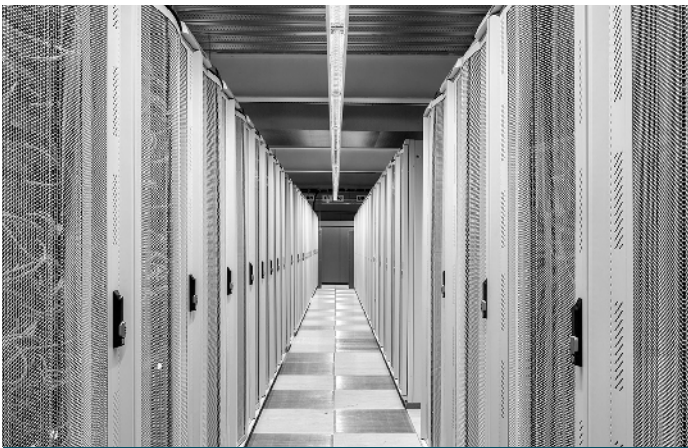


Photo courtesy of Digital Realty



Health and Safety: A Part of the Culture



Photo courtesy of Digital Realty

The transformation of health and safety at Digital Realty stems from the challenge of managing an ever-expanding portfolio of data centers around the world through new construction and acquisitions, said [Mike Buckingham](#), Vice President of Europe, Middle East and Africa Operations at Digital Realty.

The growth necessitated a more mature mindset about the value of embedding health and safety with the companywide culture, he explained.

“A safe site is a well-managed, well-executed site where people are trained effectively,” Buckingham said. “That’s a culture where people can hold up a hand and go, ‘I am

uncomfortable with what’s going on,’ without repercussions.”

When this type of health and safety permeates work culture, the data center begins to run like a premier Formula 1 race team, noted Legg.

“You can feel it,” he said. “You can see it. You can hear the people laughing and joking, but you can equally hear the serious conversations. There’s this sense of purpose.”

A safe work environment also motivates people to show up and engage day in and day out, noted [Santiago Suinaga](#), Chief Executive Officer of [Infrastructure Masons](#) (iMasons), a global nonprofit professional association that unites the builders of the digital age.



Efforts to create a workplace culture where employees feel valued aligns with iMasons' initiatives to attract, train and retain skilled people, which is a top-tier challenge as the digital infrastructure industry expands to keep pace with the demand for cloud computing and artificial intelligence (AI).

As digital infrastructure projects become larger and more complex with increased power density, ensuring that all construction workers, engineers and operators can perform at the highest level is essential, noted Suinaga.

"The data center is a living organism," he said. "You need to design, build and operate with safety standards, not just in the building and commissioning stages, but in the long run, the day-to-day operations, because that's the work environment of many technicians and you need to ensure every technician feels safe."

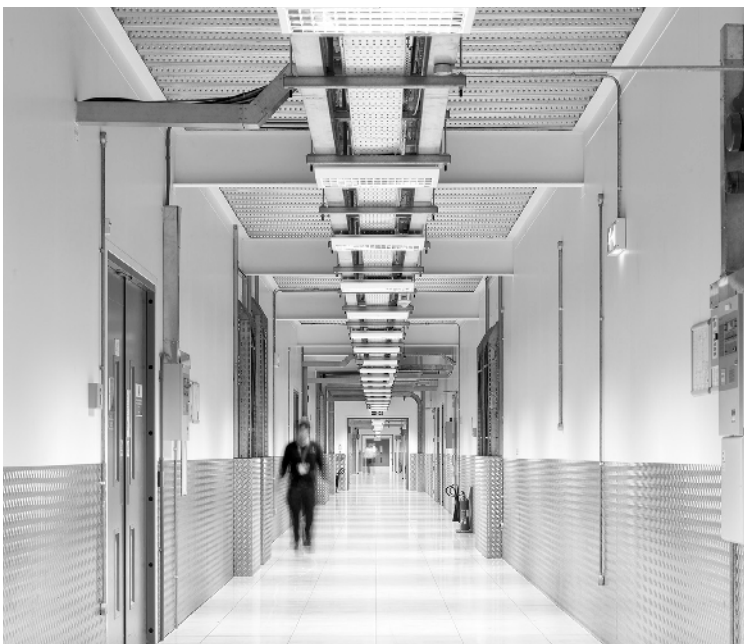


Photo courtesy of Digital Realty

"The data center is a living organism... you need to ensure every technician feels safe."

— Santiago Suinaga,
CEO of iMasons





Creating an Environment of Trust

Just as Formula 1 safety professionals are not in the cockpit of race cars, data center safety professionals are not installing and maintaining equipment at a data center. Rather, the people hired to drive Formula 1 race cars and install and maintain equipment at data centers are hired because they are competent and trained to do those jobs.

That competence, Legg noted, positions these colleagues to play an active role in the decisions that make the business more efficient and safer.

“We trust and empower our teams to tell us the 4Ds of human and organizational performance: the dumb, dangerous, difficult and different things that they have to contend with day in day out because those aspects have the potential to trigger the safety outcomes that we don’t want,” he explained. “Enabling an environment where people feel confident and trusted to say, ‘We can do this better’ creates a safer business.”

Under the leadership of Legg, Digital Realty is rolling out programs designed to create an environment of trust. This includes a higher level of face-to-face engagement with frontline operations as well as trials with digital tools that collect and analyze data on how work is done.

The face-to-face engagement is an opportunity to lead by example, noted Buckingham, the VP of EMEA Operations.

“I’m a believer of the standard you walk past is the standard you set,” he said. “My role as a leader is to set that standard with all of my leaders and then go out in the field and check it.”

Out in the field, Buckingham walks the talk. He engages colleagues with curious questions about their work environment; challenging and coaching his teams to mutually learn and improve.

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Digital Realty leadership is also trialing technological solutions such as real time engagement tools, cameras and wearable sensors that provide insights to the 99% of the time when work is successful and accidents are avoided but “we don’t know whether it’s by design or people have to adapt to the situation and work out the workaround. The technology will assist us to learn this,” said Legg.

The ability to collect this data and analyze it with AI has potential to lead to more efficient work.

For example, data collection and analysis efforts might identify a situation where workers routinely need to work at height to adjust a filter and suggest a system redesign that positions the filter at ground level to make it easier to deliver more efficiently and safer, noted Legg.

Long term, Buckingham sees AI tools focused on safety becoming embedded in day-to-day operations to augment how work is done safely.

“Technology doesn’t have a fatigue issue. It doesn’t come to work distracted with the pressures of every-day life,” he said. “That’s where overlaying technology is a way of helping our people work more safely and effectively.”

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— Mike Buckingham,
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Opportunity for Innovation

Just like in Formula 1, where individual teams' efforts to improve safety have made the sport safer overall, I hope the insights we gain through AI and other initiatives have a ripple effect throughout the digital infrastructure industry."

— Benjamin Legg,
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Digital Realty is also exploring the potential to glean insights from AI models trained on the company's operational systems and data across their portfolio of work.

The company's years of experience and global footprint have the potential to yield a deep, rich dataset to train AI models and get a holistic and tailored view of health and safety practices, noted Suinaga, the iMasons CEO.

"Being a data center operator in my past life, I understand that as you scale up and add locations, you build an archive of stories, incidents, trends and solutions," he said. "Once you run that history of events through AI, you can get unique guidelines for your operations."

Just like in Formula 1, where individual teams' efforts to improve safety have made the sport safer overall, Legg hopes the insights he gains through AI and other initiatives have a ripple effect throughout the digital infrastructure industry.

Digital Realty's experience and reach makes them a natural leader for this transformation, noted Suinaga.

"iMasons encourages platforms to collaborate with each other and share health and safety best practices," he said. "This is an area where we don't compete."



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