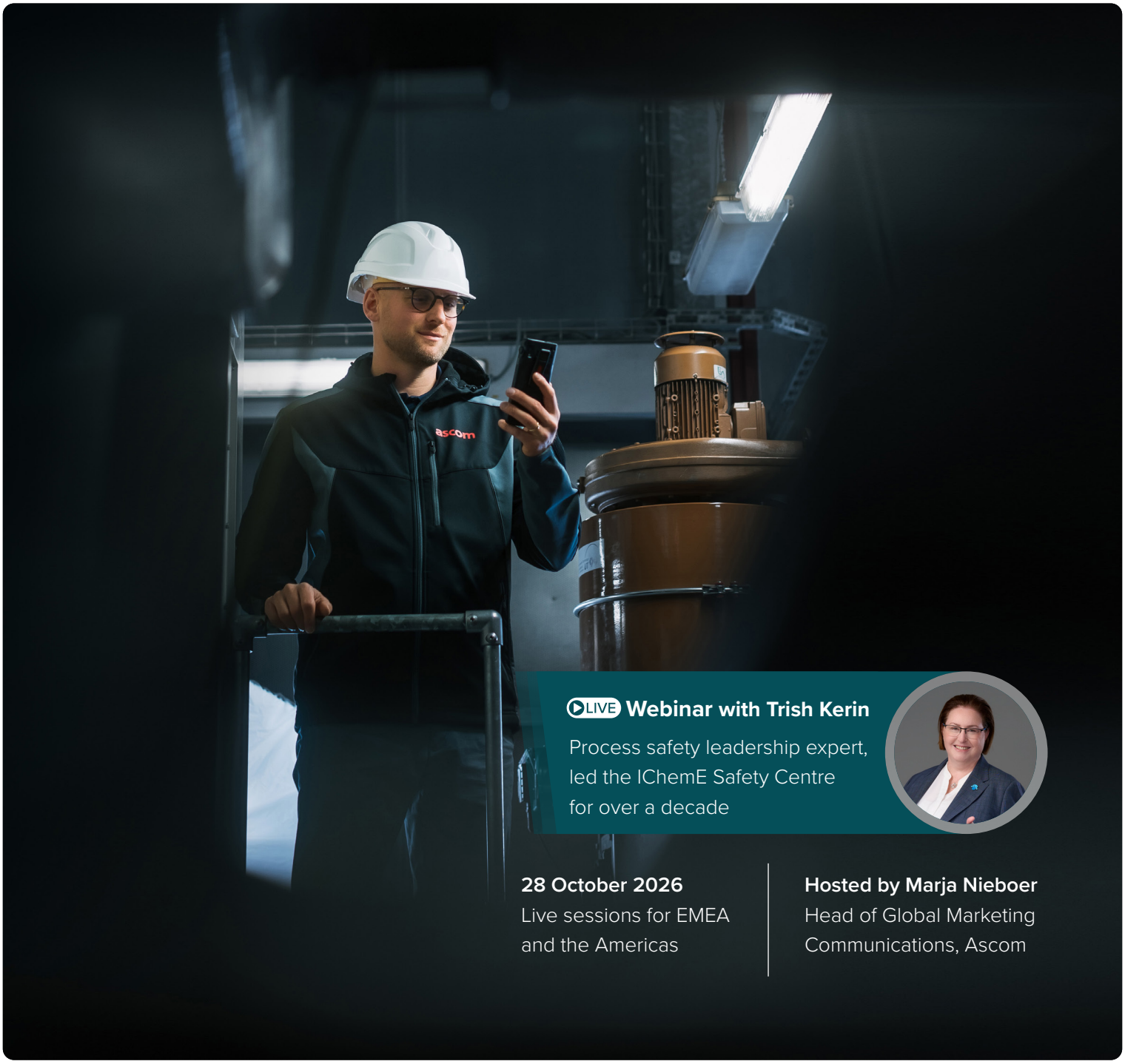
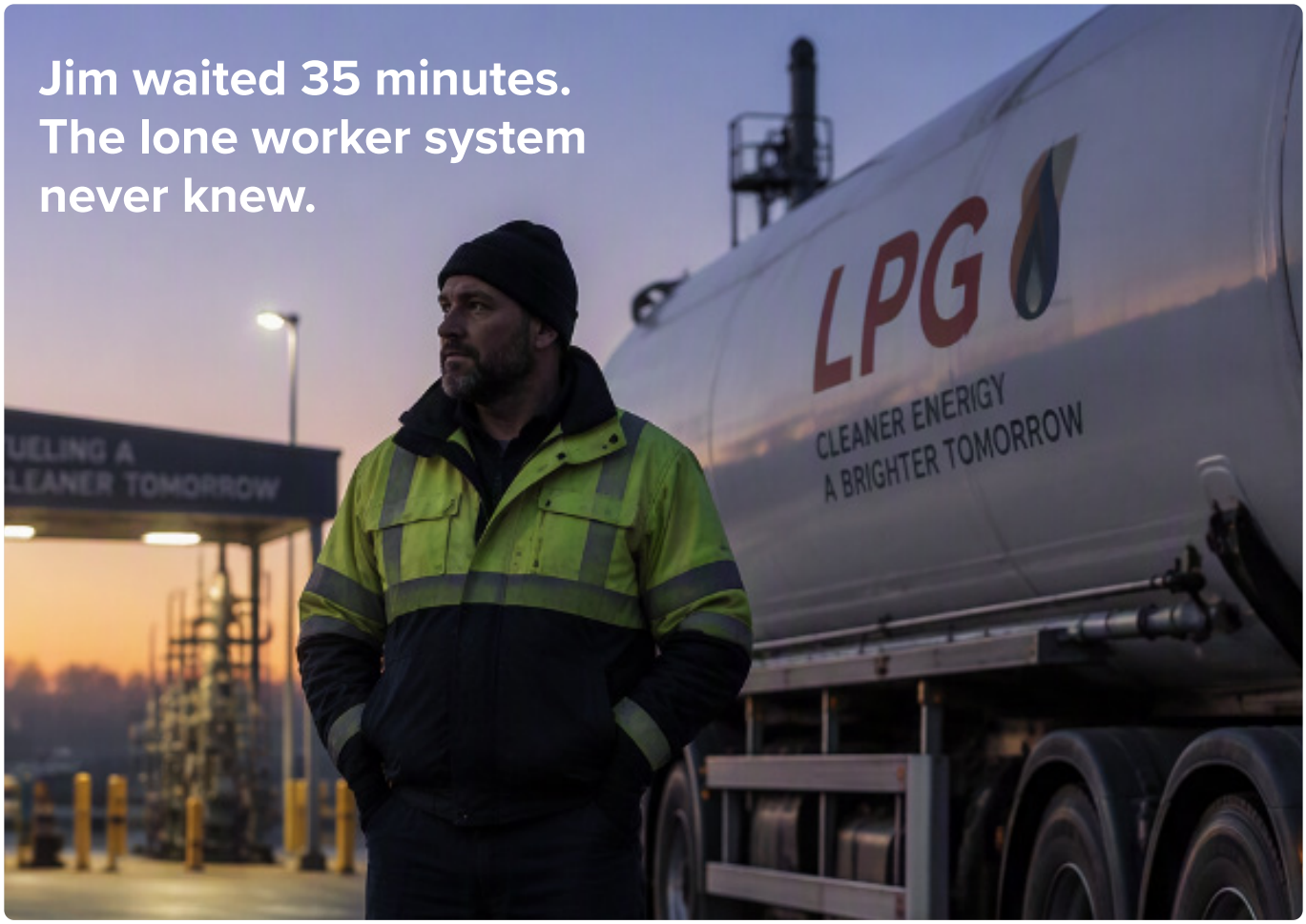
WEBINAR SUMMARY

ascom | The Human Element series

How to build a culture of safety in 2026, before a crisis strikes

Trish Kerin on lone workers, false comfort and why curious leaders run safer sites. With her answers to the questions from the audience.





At 5:20 in the morning, a driver named Jim was loading LPG at a terminal. He was alone, as he often was at that hour.

When he pulled the loading hose from its cradle, the valve opened and liquid gas struck him. He fell, hit his head and got up again to rinse himself under a fire hose. The gas alarm shut down the pumps and told security there was a leak. **It told nobody that a person was hurt.**

The terminal had what everyone called a lone worker system. Trish Kerin investigated the incident and found it was a dead man's switch: a button the driver had to press every few minutes to keep the pumps running. If he stopped, the plant would shut down safely. Nothing in the system would raise the alarm for the driver. Because of its name, managers had believed for years that their lone workers were covered. **Nobody had asked what the system did.**

Leaders don't need to understand every technical detail of their plant, Trish argued. **They do need to be curious enough to question what they assume, and to know at a high level what each safety control does and how they would find out it works.**

> **"Curiosity killed the cat.**
> **But satisfaction brought it back."**
>
> **Trish Kerin**

What leaders can take from it

Curiosity is a leadership skill	Trish calls it a superpower that many leaders lack. Admitting you don't know something takes courage. Without it, decisions get made on wrong information.
Ask the people who do the work	Procedures describe work as imagined. Only the people doing the task know how it really gets done, and the two are never the same.
Ask to learn, and ask to teach	"Can you take me through this?" invites an answer. "Why did you do that?" sounds like blame.
Make bad news safe to bring	How you react decides whether people tell you again. A sigh is enough to shut them up. Thank them, and act on what they say.
Slow is fast	Time spent explaining and checking understanding saves rework and repeat incidents. When danger is imminent, intervene first and ask later.

Start with one system this week



Marja closed the session with a simple challenge: pick one safety system on your site and put three questions to the people who use it every day.

1. **What safety systems do we have?**
2. **What does this one actually do?**
3. **How do we know it works?**

In the EMEA session, 41% of participants said they have a lone worker system on site, and 36% said they know exactly what it does. Jim's terminal would have answered yes to the first question as well. The system even had ‘lone worker’ in its name.

Trish also shared how she builds the habit herself. Before bed she asks one question: what unusual thing happened today? Usually it is something she didn't notice at the time. Taking a moment to think about it keeps curiosity in practice.

> **“Questions are how we understand what is happening around us.”**
>
> **Trish Kerin**

The Human Element series

Safety starts with people, and that is the idea behind the Human Element Series. Ascom brings together insights from industry experts to explore the human side of safety in complex enterprise environments, and how leadership, culture, behavior and decision-making contribute to safer, stronger organizations.

Trish Kerin answers your questions



What is the difference between a dead man's switch and a lone worker system?

One protects the equipment, the other protects the person.

- **Dead man's switch:** the operator presses a button at set intervals. If they stop, the plant shuts down safely. Train drivers and fuel pumps work the same way.
- **Lone worker system:** a device worn by the worker raises an alarm when they fall, collapse or are hurt, and sends it to someone who can start a rescue straight away.

How could a lone worker system have helped Jim?

It wouldn't have prevented the incident, but **it could have raised the alarm automatically and helped get support to him faster.**

Have you seen curiosity improve safety in practice?

Yes: reported incidents went up, and fewer people got hurt. Trish joined a company with a poor safety record as safety manager. The workers knew what was going wrong but nobody told management. She coached leaders to go out on site, ask real questions and fix what people reported. Six months later reported incidents had risen, as she had predicted. The incidents were less severe and the business became safer and more productive.

How do you ask questions in a team with a strong hierarchy?

Build trust first. People need to know they won't be punished for speaking up. If you are senior, go first: ask questions yourself, admit what you don't know and thank people who ask you something.

What is psychological safety?

Feeling safe to speak up or ask a question without fear of getting into trouble. The term comes from Amy Edmondson's research. Trish described it as being comfortable enough to be uncomfortable.

How do you change a safety culture, in one or two sentences?

When you ask people a question, listen to the answer and do something with it. Ignore them and they stop telling you. Punish them and they never tell you anything again.

Answers combine both live sessions and are lightly edited for readability.

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About Ascom
Our vision is a world where the right information moves people forward. Our mission is to put the right information in the right hands at the right time so that people can make the best possible decisions.

We are a global provider of communication and collaboration solutions for the acute care, long-term care and enterprise sectors. Our solutions are based on intelligent integrations with software and hardware that are open source and compatible with third party solutions. Every single second, our systems generate large amounts of data, which we then turn into useful and actionable information. This helps us to bring data to life for people in the toughest operational environments, ensuring smooth, complete, and efficient workflows.

Ascom is headquartered in Baar (Switzerland), has operating businesses in 19 countries and employs around 1,400 people worldwide. Ascom registered shares (ASCN) are listed on the SIX Swiss Exchange in Zurich.

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