If a butterfly beats its wings in Brazil, there could be a tornado in Brooklyn. The little details make the difference. In the world of process safety, the little details apply to the base of the traditional safety pyramid. Failure to implement the little details may not in themselves lead to a serious incident or even a near-miss, and in the vast majority of cases nothing happens. But little failures beget bigger failures, and when this failure to attend to little details becomes a common mode failure, process safety incidents are around the corner.

Little details are easy to let slip. You get busy, you get distracted, you're tired, you're sick, or you're upset. Your buddy or your manager thinks it's none of his or her business, or has problems of his or her own. Or maybe neither of you care. But that's the whole point. You have to care: about the product you are making and the people who will use it, about the person you're providing service to, about your coworkers, because without caring, you have no idea what the end result of your team's combined efforts will be - and the result could be disastrous.

Imagine if you could build a computer which had, in place of digital (0 and 1, yes and no) junctions had junctions which could take the position yes and no but the certainty of the position varied due to an additional input which varied between "care" and "don't care". Clearly, if the inputs for each junction were set to "care", the accuracy of the computer's result would be determined only by the microchips physical limits. However, as the input swings to "don't care", the accuracy of the computer's result could be correct, or could be disastrously wrong.

The only thing of importance that leaders do is create culture. By creating the right culture, where everyone cares about the successful end result, including quality, safety, and cost, workers are more prone to paying attention to the little details and coworkers and supervisors are covering their backs. I've been in teams that could do no wrong, and on teams that could do no right. The difference between the two extremes - the level of alignment to the end result - is, in hindsight, perfectly clear.