

The Psychology of Safety

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When the phone rang, I answered with the same friendly voice that I normally would. The person on the other end didn't sound so jubilant. It was the wife of a couple that I had married not many years prior. Through her tears, she proceeded to explain to me the accident that her husband had, just days before. He was in the back of his truck when he lost his balance and hit the pavement headfirst. He seemed fine at the time, but she insisted on driving him to the hospital. Not long after arriving at the hospital, he died in the emergency room from head injuries. The wedding that she asked me to perform years ago was now a request for officiating his funeral.

Have you ever left your home in the morning, considering that you may not make it home alive that day or end up in the hospital seriously injured? Unless you work in a high-risk position, it's not even a consideration for most people when they start out their day. By the very nature of the word, accidents are not planned. No one plans on a serious injury or fatality. Yet it happens, every day. Injury or even death are no respecter of persons. It can happen at any time, any place, no matter your age, race, gender or experience. It can happen to you. You and I just expect to make it home safe and sound - for us and our loved ones. Short of a natural disaster, most, if not all work-related accidents are avoidable.

Safety is one of those subjects that doesn't get a whole lot of consideration until an accident occurs. It's after the fact that safety measures are put into place. It's after an accident that safety becomes a top priority, at least for the time being. Yet, safety needs to be more than a priority. It must be the greatest value of every individual and business, employer and employee.

Value Safety, Value Life

Placing value on safety, places value on your life. How would your family be affected if you didn't make it home from work or were seriously injured to the point of not being able to do the things you now take for granted? Your death or disability will forever impact your life and the lives of your family and friends. It only takes one incident to live with regret. "If only" would ring in your ears unceasingly. "If only I would have done this". "If only I wouldn't have done that". What we value, we give attention to. When safety becomes a value then our attention to it follows. Your safety demands your attention.

No Shortcuts to Safety

Short cuts save us time, when everything goes right. But when they go wrong, not only can it cost you more time, but it can cost you so much more than that. Time saved is never worth risking an injury. When it comes to safety, the risk is never worth the reward. From lockout/tagout to PPE, following safety protocol is worth the time involved. Just ask the family of the young man who died while changing a filter on a gas dispenser, getting doused with gas and static electricity starting a fire. Simple everyday tasks can turn deadly if safety procedures are not followed. Never take shortcuts when it comes to your safety and the safety of those around you. It's always worth the effort and time that it takes to utilize proper PPE and follow safety measures. Nothing else matters if your safety is compromised.

Situational Awareness

When one of our calibration technicians stepped off the platform located on the back of his truck, his ankle turned, and knee “popped”. That injury put him out of work for many months. The platform sits lower than the bumper, about a foot off the ground. It wasn’t a risky step to take, but due to the uneven ground from the buildup of snow and ice, that’s all it took to sustain an injury. He’d taken that step numerable times a day, but this time was different. The circumstances had changed.

There are changing variables all around us. The weather changes. The traffic changes. Our attitude changes. It’s imperative that we recognize those changes and adjust our actions accordingly. Take a break if you become frustrated. Slow down if you feel rushed. Always evaluate the ever-changing circumstances in your work environment. Take the time to evaluate your next move. Identify the risks, look for an alternative route, and be intentional when it comes to making safe decisions.

Take Ownership of Your Safety

Every person is responsible for their own safety. Every person needs to take ownership of their own safety. If the work that you are going to perform cannot be done safely, you have the authority and responsibility to stop the work until you have the necessary equipment to do your job safely. You know better than anyone, if your safety is at stake. Notify your supervisor if you need additional equipment or assistance to perform that task safely.

This article has been more of a physiological approach than a practical “how to” guide on safety. That’s because safety starts with a mindset. Whether at work or home, everything that you do must be looked at through the lens of safety. Otherwise, that one incident could cost you your life as you know it. Consider this your safety pep talk. Let it motivate you towards a greater safety mindset. You will be able to live without regretting that one decision and it will mean the world to those who care about you. It’s your life. It’s your safety - own it!