EDITORIAL

We recently concluded tabulating the data for the Body of Knowledge that will be used to align the CSHM exam. We deeply appreciate the folks who took the time and effort to evaluate and comment on the process. The participation of professional safety managers is essential to keeping ISHM current and relevant. Again, thank you!!!

We are still looking for a CSHM in the Washington State area to mentor an ASHM who recently moved to the area. Interested??

ISHM will hold a board meeting in conjunction with the NSC Expo in Orlando, Florida. The meeting will be on October 20, 2012 starting at 12:30 PM local time. Please let us know if you would like to attend so we can assure sufficient space for all who desire to participate.

Finally, it is the time of year that ISHM is accepting nominations for the ASHM of the year. Please submit a nomination form for a deserving person.

Thanks for your support of ISHM!!!!

IN THIS EDITION

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Section One – “You can’t scare me!” By Dave Johnson
Remember those playground and schoolyard taunts? “Nah, nah, you can’t scare me!” “I ain’t yellow!”

Well, psychologists say those kids were on to something. It turns out you can’t often scare people with fear tactics.

You know, tactics like grisly driver training movies showing decapitated bodies lined on the road. Workplace safety training films depicting any number of gruesome calamities: trench cave-ins, electrocutions, falls, forklifts running off loading docks, machinery chewing up fingers and arms, confined space rescues with one man going down after another.

The list is practically endless, and yes, some training companies have stocked their libraries full of scare ‘em flicks. Not as popular as they once were because audiences are more sophisticated and heck, TV is gory enough these days.

Victims of workplace disasters, grotesquely burned to near death, robbed of limbs, can hold vast audiences spellbound as they tell their tales. But a week later, what do those workers in the audience remember? A month gone by?

You see, the reason we — teenagers and adults — don’t scare easy is due to something psychologists call “cognitive bias.” You might also call it “perceptual distortion” or “inaccurate judgment.”

Cognitive has to do with how we see the world and think about what we take in. And most of what we take in passes through filters, or blinders in some sorry cases. These are the biases that shape perceptions and form judgments.

Most of us have formed the personal judgment somewhere along the way that “it can’t happen to me.” “Accidents happen to some unlucky soul, not me, brother!”

It’s a challenge for safety professionals to breakthrough cognitive biases. They’ve been formed over a lifetime, reinforced by years of experience. “This is the way I’ve always done my job. I’ve never, never gotten hurt.”

This past June, after the ASSE meeting in Denver, I took a road trip up to the Badlands National Park in South Dakota. I had my own cognitive biases working. Most of the time we’re not even conscious of them and the filtering and blinding they do.

“Stay on the trail” was a warning sign I saw time and again. Sometimes the warning was accompanied by a pictograph of a stick figure falling off of a cliff.”

I ignored these warnings. See, I have hiked off the trail in many a beautiful spot throughout the west. Nothing bad had ever come of it. Like workers who do the same job for years, I felt confident in ignoring the warnings, competent that I could handle scrambling and improvising beyond the trail, and I felt it was definitely worth taking this risk, which I didn’t “see” or perceive as much of a risk, because the consequences or rewards were so much worth it: beautiful vistas, no crowds, no one blabbing into their cell phone, better chances of seeing animals at play, great photo ops.

Well, like bad karma my years of living by faulty cognitive biases caught up to me in the Badlands. Of course it was a shock. My fall while climbing up a short rise of loose clay shocked me so to this day I cannot remember how it
happened. No one was with me – another risk I ignored. I don’t know how far I fell, probably less than ten feet, and I have no memory of how I landed.

I was a bloody mess. A very lucky bloody mess. Yeah, I was bleeding over one eye, had abrasions and contusions on my hands, arms, shoulders, chest, knees. I was somehow in a sitting position wedged between rocks and I couldn’t move. Couldn’t stand up.

I had no cell phone and no water – two more very “inaccurate judgments.” Sitting there waiting for a hiker to come by, I was more embarrassed than scared. I knew I was close to a popular trail, within sight of it, so someone soon would reach me. But how could someone experienced as I was slip up so badly? That was what I was thinking while picking pieces of gravel from my hands and arms and scalp, waiting for help.

Help arrived soon enough, no more than a half hour’s wait. Hikers phoned in my position. Then the real cavalry came: the park EMTs, a National Guard chopper, state and county police. Since my right leg was useless I couldn’t walk out, and I couldn’t be carried out due to a log ladder on the trail. Strapped up on a litter with a neck brace, like a fallen football player who they can’t tell how badly he might be hurt, I was first choppered out of the park to a parking lot. A second, larger chopper then flew me 75 miles to the Rapid City Regional Hospital in western South Dakota.

X-rays showed three fractured ribs, but no broken leg, wrist, elbow, neck or back. Like I said, I am a very lucky dude.

Will this tale “scare” any would-be hikers who might read this into reconsidering going off the beaten path? I doubt it. Most risk-takers are set in their ways. They don’t know me, don’t know anything about my trail skills or experiences. Just another poor bastard in another wire service article about a successful rescue.

The one place I see scare stories working is when one of your coworkers, longtime buddy maybe, gets seriously injured doing the same job you do, or close to it. When he or she tells what happened, how it happened, at a safety meeting, it can resonate because it’s like a shell in combat hitting right outside your foxhole. Hey, that was a close hit. That was a good friend of mine. We did the same job. He’s pretty messed up. I hate to see him busted up like that. I’d hate to see myself that way. Maybe it’s time to think some about how I do this job.

To get folks truly thinking about their safety and how they go about their work – that’s breaking a wall of personal biases and denials. Storytelling can be a potent tool; the closer to home the story hits, the better your chance for a breakthrough.

Dave Johnson
Editor, ISHN magazine

Section Two – Challenge and be Challenged

For a long time I have been saying that to grow professionally we need to challenge and be challenged. By doing this we can eliminate complacency and at the same time increase our professional knowledge and skills. Dave Johnson has for a long time been throwing out interesting and sometimes ‘on the fringe’ ideas and asking us to answer and offer our insights on the topic. Interesting, challenging, thought provoking and none of that would happen if he were not challenging us.
Entrepreneur, blogger, technology consultant and community builder Chris Hardie wrote an article “Challenge and be Challenged in Conversation”. He captured my thoughts in his article. Chris graciously has allowed me to include it in this newsletter.

I attended a presentation recently where the person speaking was talking about when it is and is not appropriate to challenge your host’s views, perhaps at a dinner party or other social event. He noted that in some cultures, it’s perfectly appropriate and expected to have a heated discussion about the topic at hand, and that it is done without introducing any sense of offense, malice or personal attack. In the U.S., he noted, we tend to make (and take) everything so personal that it is generally not acceptable to challenge someone’s views unless (the narrative goes) you are prepared to take extraordinary measures to dance around their ego and perhaps walk away never to speak to each other again.

As I thought about these observations (which I suppose are fairly obvious to those who hop between cultures), I realized that I’m definitely someone who prefers to be challenged, and who gets the most out of a conversation when I feel safe doing the challenging. But I know that in the course of seeking healthy dialog, especially dialog in the public sphere amongst relative strangers, it can still be quite a balancing act to engage in challenge with a positive outcome. And I worry that our fear of challenging or being challenged, or being out of practice with actually doing it, means that we end up missing out on great opportunities for conversation and building shared vision with those around us. So I thought it worth writing down some of the ways that I find useful to challenge and be challenged, in hopes of eliciting comments and refinements from others who find themselves aware of their own tendencies and preferences in these areas.

First, I should be more clear about what I mean when I talk about challenging someone. If you’re already clearly engaged in a debate or dialog about an issue (such as you might be at a book club, or debate competition, or editorial board meeting), then you may be challenging each others’ perspectives or opinions, but that’s not the kind of challenge I’m referring to. I’m talking about a setting like the scenario mentioned above, where there’s no default expectation that a statement or expressed view is in question, or that the listeners will react in any remotely opposing way to the speaker.

A dinner gathering where conversation is typically kept polite. A hallway conversation about the day’s news. A social exchange in a public place. These seem like settings where if someone says “Red really is the greatest color out there, and so…” and you happen to think that red is simply the worst color out there, you generally aren’t expected to interrupt them to say so, if you say anything at all. The challenge is a turning point where the chit-chat has ended, where the weather is no longer relevant, and the topic at hand is of importance to those conversing. And of course, I’m not talking about colors here….for me, red is politics, red is reproductive rights, red is money management, red is peak oil and climate change, red is how to raise kids properly, red is peace and justice issues, red is religion and spirituality. What do I get out of being challenged? I’m asked to reconsider my views, to explore where they came from, to understand where I’m at with them now – that’s exciting! I learn how to communicate better, to make myself understood in ways that I don’t currently know – that’s great! I get to know viewpoints that are not my own, to really understand them, and perhaps even to adopt them – wonderful. When I think of times in my life when I’ve grown the most, felt the most alive, they are times when I’ve been challenged into new ways of looking at the world.
So, If someone wants to tell me that I’m wrong about red, to challenge me on my views, here are some ways that really work for me:

- **Speaking plainly and boldly about how you feel.** “Chris, I think you’re just wrong about that, and here’s why.” I respect it when feelings and views are not diluted out of concern for ego or politeness, though I certainly understand and frequently give in to that impulse.

- **Maintaining the tone of the conversation even as its importance or intensity may escalate.** I appreciate that some people express themselves best through raising their voice or gesturing wildly, but I generally don’t respond well to it. I think emphasis and importance can be shown in ways that don’t alienate someone (like me) who wants to hear and process the words as clearly as possible, without distraction. I fully realize that this is just something I can hope for, but not expect out of many people.

- **Understanding my perspective fully.** As I always strive to do for someone in a conversation, I can most engage another when I know that they are trying to see an issue from where I stand, and ask the questions necessary to get there. If it is always left to me to “make my position clear” and the other person isn’t invested in helping, then things quickly turn to debate and thoughts of victory for victory’s sake, instead of genuine mutual understanding.

Here are some things that really don’t work for me:

- **Interrupting.** If I’m interrupting someone, then we’re not having a conversation, we’re exchanging monologues, and we’re back to trying to win instead of trying to understand or agree. If someone is interrupting me, then I no longer have any sense of confidence in their ability to hear me out, and I just want the conversation to be over. I know that many, many interruption-laden conversations happen every day in families, businesses, and public spaces every day, and I know that it seems normal to some, but for me it’s a symptom of the declining quality of important dialog.

- **Justifying a challenge based solely on vague personal declarations of understanding about how the world is.** I’m fully in support of having conversation in this country that is LESS focused on the might and power of logic to the detriment of emotion and less cerebral forms of connection. But, if you’re going to tell me that I’m wrong about red, you can’t JUST tell me that it’s because you feel that way: “Chris, you’re wrong about red because everything I’ve ever experienced tells me so.” Whatever your reasoning, or emoting, or deep sense of right and wrong that guides you, you have to find a way to help me see it if we are to understand each other.

When I challenge someone, there are a number of things I take into consideration:

- **Is this a situation where challenging this person can have a good and worthwhile outcome?** Is it possible for us to have an exchange that is meaningful? If not, is the challenge about an issue that is important enough to go ahead anyway (i.e. standing up for something on principle more important than my relationship with the person I’m challenging)? Will the resulting conversation be impacted negatively by the setting? Would a written challenge be more effective?

- **When I challenge someone’s views, can I do it in a way that authentically represents my own views or that respectively questions the reservations I have about their views, or is it just going to be a negation of something**
they’ve said that leaves no real path forward for them in the conversation? Am I challenging out of care, or out of the desire to be right?

- **When does it end?** If we challenge each other, and we don’t come to some point of understanding or clarity, how will we find closure? Does the other person want to resolve the challenge as much as I do (or more, or less)? What kinds of signs should I look for that they’re done? When and how will I express my need to end the conversation?

That’s what I have for now. What do you think? Do you like to challenge or be challenged in a conversation? If not, why not? If so, what methods or approach do and don’t work for you?

You can find Chris at: [http://www.summersault.com/](http://www.summersault.com/)