EDITORIAL

We are always on the lookout for exciting articles by credible authors to include in the ISHM newsletter. This month we are fortunate to have articles by two professionals that we believe will cause us to stop and reflect on our profession and how we approach our responsibilities. As always we hope that the articles will generate discussion and that you will take the time to share your thoughts. We firmly believe that the key to professional growth is discussion with our peers. We look forward to printing your responses in the next newsletter.

IN THIS EDITION

Section One – ASSE DENVER
Section Two – Bless her heart by Timothy Ludwig
Section Three – Air of Acceptance by Jim Leemann

Section One – ASSE DENVER

ISHM will have an exhibit booth at the ASSE Expo in Denver June 3 – 5, 2012. Additionally the exam committee would like to hold a test question workshop. The process would be for attendees to bring 15- 20 potential exam questions and then the group work through them to assure accuracy and reliability. If you can participate in this it will be of great benefit to the validity of the CSHM exam. Please let me know soon as I need to reserve a meeting space if there will be enough folks in attendance. (PLEASE PLEAD PLEAD PLEAD)

Section Two – Bless her heart by Timothy Ludwig
Bless her Heart!
Taking personal responsibility for safety.

Timothy Ludwig, Ph.D., Safety-Doc.com

“One key to an ideal safety culture that drastically to take responsibility for safety.” All the southern vigorously to my statement. They were taking time hygiene products plant to discuss safety with me.

I had them right where I wanted them. “What was the plant?” I found out that a high school intern was some stairs in the front office area. She slipped, fell, accounting, all the ladies were in a stir, “Bless her volleyball and she missed her season.” They even her, as southern women tend to do.

Now I drop the other shoe pointing at the Heart Blesser, “Why did you let that happen?” One could hear the collect breath intake as the indignation grew. “She was an intern…didn’t even work for us.” “She was probably carrying too much and didn’t hold the hand rail.” “Not in my department.” “We work out in the plant where there are real dangers; she was up in the front office.”

“Now hold on ladies… I just said that everyone has to take responsibility for safety…you all nodded!” I said, mocking confusion, “so your responsible for her fall and injury.” Just imagine the scuttle as they continued to justify how this was different or somehow separate from them. Then something culturally significant happened, a couple of them started asking the right questions: “Where did this happen?” “What else was going on?” “Had she been given training?”

Finally, it was the Bake Sale Planner who asked, “Was that those stairs by the door out front? You know, the ones near the outside courtyard where some of us go on smoke breaks? Yeah, yeah… those get kind of wet when we all walk back in after a dewy morning.” I was expecting yet another round of blessings and bake sales but then…

Heart Blesser, quietly yet clearly said “know what? I’ve slipped on those stairs when they’ve been wet.” Many nods accompanied this statement. “When I slipped and caught myself I thought to myself ‘I wish someone would take care of this’.” More nods and some predictable statements like “They should do something”.

But then the statement worth a thousand bake sales: “I guess I was embarrassed so I never told anyone.” Heart Blesser said this sternly over the clamber, effectively quieting the group. Then quieter herself Heart Blesser said, “and if I would have said something and done something about it… that poor young girl would have played volleyball last season.”

Lesson delivered: By not taking personal responsibility to report the near miss, the stair hazard was not fixed and this led to an injury. Everyone who noticed those wet stairs is responsible.
This is an unfortunate story that can be played out almost anywhere – with sobering lessons. My friends Scott Geller and Steve Roberts from Safety Performance Solutions, tell the story of when they were called to a cement manufacturing plant down in Texas where there was a fatality. They were, among other things, helping with the investigation. A man was carrying about 40 lbs. of compound over his shoulder on a walkway positioned above the huge vats of mixing product. There were grates in the walkway so different compounds could be poured directly in the vat. He stepped on a grate which then gave way and he fell into the machinery.

Scott and Steve say that a supervisor, at one point said, “we all walked over that grate…it would clatter around because it had warped its shape over time. I guess we all just started walking around it instead of over…I know I did.” Ultimately “I, heck, any of us, should have reported that and got it fixed. And poor Joe would still…”I’m frankly tired of hearing the old Heinrich data from the 1930s that asserts, “88% of worker injuries are due to the worker’s unsafe act”. Firstly, it sends the “blame the worker” message that kills cultures. Secondly, somehow this stat has been attributed to behavioral safety programs which, if you know behavioral science you’d know that we always look at environmental influences of behavior (incidentally, Heinrich was an insurance investigator). But my biggest problem with this assertion is that has allowed incident investigation to list “Human Factor” or “Worker Error” to be the “root cause” of an incident.

Certainly, it would be simple to arrive at the conclusions that “the young girl did not use the handrail” therefore it was a human error. But what is the solution to human errors? Typically it is more exhortations for everyone to “Use Hand Rails” which may change behavior for a week before drifting away. Or we can erroneously hope that we can discipline the errors out of people. And the incidents reoccur.

The next best conclusion, also very easy to arrive at, is “They (I think they are talking about management) did not maintain the equipment and facilities adequately to reduce the hazard of the stairs.” The typical Us vs. Them drama then ensues with workers pointing at management as the source of the problem and management pointing at workers as the source of the problem.

I hope the irony of this situation is not lost on anyone when you think back to your first grade teacher saying “when you point at someone else (with your index finger)…you have three fingers pointing back at yourself!”

Indeed, the very first domino to fall in all of these scenarios is the lack of a safety culture where everyone takes responsibility for the safety of others. You take responsibility for the safety of others through reporting near misses and minor injuries, identifying hazards formally, and coaching peers when anyone sees behaviors that put workers at risk. You take responsibility for the safety of others when you give safety talks at tailgate meetings, join safety committees, and praise each other for safe practices. You take responsibility for the safety of others when you actively participate in the safety culture.

You see, it is quite probable that I, personally, never slipped on those stairs or stepped around that grate. But it is quite probable that I, personally, have had an incident that happened in my area that I was too embarrassed, scared, or thought to little of to report. And, because I didn’t report it or just told a friend about it when we were complaining about management…
I did not do *my* part to build *our* safety culture into one where reporting is what *we* do, what *we* value, and what *we* expect.

Do your part. Take responsibility for your safety culture. Bake sales are not enough.

*Timothy Ludwig’s website is Safety-Doc.com where you can read more safety culture stories and contribute your own.*

Dr. Ludwig is a senior consultant with Safety Performance Solutions (SPS: safetyperformance.com), serves as a commissioner for Behavioral Safety Accreditation at the non-profit Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies (CCBS: behavior.org) and teaches behavioral psychology at Appalachian State University, in Boone, NC. If you want Tim to share his stories at your next safety event you can contact him at TimLudwig@Safety-Doc.com.

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Section Three – Air of Acceptance by Jim Leemann

Dave Johnson who is a board member of ISHM issued a challenge.

At the American Industrial Hygiene Conference and Expo in Indy on Tuesday June 19 from 1:30 – 3:00 pm I will moderate a “town hall” discussion. The question I’ll pose:

Agree or disagree: In the U.S. evidence shows the nation has decided an acceptable, tolerable level of risk has been reached in workplaces, with no further need for rules and policies, especially if they cost jobs.

Follow up: So what do EHs professionals do about this?

I argue the national consensus this: we have reached an acceptable, tolerable level of risk in our workplaces. Yes, too many are still injured and killed, but we don’t live in a perfect world – you will simply never reach zero in 5 million workplaces - and you have to make hard choices about national priorities. The media and pols react to public worries, and Gallup shows the public ain’t thinking about worker health.

Gallup Poll March 28, 2012 – American’s National Worries (in ranking order)
The economy
gas prices
fed spending / budget deficit
available and affordable healthcare
unemployment
social security
size and power of fed govt
hunger and homeless
crime
drug use
quality of environment – 37% concerned a great deal
terrorism
illegal immigrants
race relations
Worker safety and health doesn’t make the top 15 cut. Might not make the top 30. The public, media, lawmakers accept the current level of worker protection. No push, no protests.

Then consider these factors:

- 70% of workers are satisfied with the health and safety practices of their employer. Only 9% are dissatisfied. (American Psychological Association/Harris Interactive Poll, March 2011)
- Workplace injuries and illnesses are at an all-time low.
- Workplace deaths have dropped from 16 per day to 12 per day. There is 30-year trend of declining fatalities. Deaths dropped just as fast from 1933-2005 (John Stossel in his new book).
- OSHA issues one reg every 8 years.
- Corporations are much more active promoting sustainability and corporate social responsibility.
- Worker safety and health is largely not considered a sustainability issue.
- Low-hanging fruit has been plucked. It is very costly to improve safety further.
- Only 30% of the workforce is exposed to physical and chemical hazards of greater intensity or duration than prevalent in the non-work environment. (Dr. Frank Mirer)
- "I see EHS continually being pushed to operate on less and less money." (Dan O’Brien)

I’d like your input to prepare for this session and get the most out of it.

2 questions:
1. Agree or disagree: An “air of acceptance” exists in the U.S. that workplace hazards are at an acceptable, tolerable level of risk. Workers, employers, the public, the media, and lawmakers all have reached this conclusion. This threatens EHS budgets and demand for EHS pros in the future.
2. What can the EHS profession do to prevent being marginalized?

This is where Jim Leemann Chimed In. Hopefully you will find this as illuminating as I did.

Dave,

I don't think we have reached an acceptable, tolerable level of risk in our workplaces. The issue of safety and health in the workplace has NEVER been one of "America's National Worries," even when there was no OSHA. Do we really think that more regulations will raise the concern of the general public when it comes to safety and health in the workplace? Give me a break; our professions have cast themselves for decades as the enforcer of OSHA rules and regulations. It is only in recent times that a few safety and health pros are waking up to the reality that being the safety cop does not work in today's work environment. The safety and health professions have become the victim of their own behaviors over the past 40 years.

With all due respect Dr. Sandman, do we really need to promote a "safety activist niche" on the order of a "worker safety Greenpeace." For a moment there, I thought I was in the 1960's. I contend if the safety and health professions gravitate to an activist mindset, these professions will become even more marginalized. Dr. Sandman, striving for "perpetual safety improvement" is a virtue I applaud, but pursuing it as a "safety activist" is a dead-end approach. As Einstein once said, "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results is the definition of insanity." We have been doing the same thing over and over again for far too long. The safety and health professions need to break out of this decades old mindset that if we only had more regulations to enforce we would be more relevant. Ever wonder why safety and health professionals rarely, if ever, become vice presidents of safety and health departments? Think about it.

As far as "quality of environment" being in the top 15, it only garnered 37% for which I would contend most of these individuals do not have the knowledge to separate propaganda from fact.

Our country has been in a recession since 2008, regardless of what the government says. One very obvious outcome of this prolonged recession has been that companies have learned how to do more with less people. Investment in manufacturing has been directed at automation, not people. Over 388,000 people were first-time filers for unemployment in the week ending April 21, 2012. We need over 200,000 jobs/month created to keep pace with current population growth and far more to become a thriving economy again. We are nowhere near eclipsing this hurdle.
I would predict that within 10 years or less whatever manufacturing is left in the USA will be run totally by computers and machines and not people. Guess what, no people, no injuries, no workers' compensation, no health insurance, no pensions, etc. Don't believe me; take a look below at the total employment in manufacturing in the USA since 2001 as of March 1, 2012.

The USA is moving toward a services-oriented business model. Eventually, we will no longer make stuff. The need for safety and health pros is going to decline precipitously over the coming years. Does a company really need a CSP or CIH when all of its employees are "Just-in-Time Workers" that work from home or the local Starbucks? Dave, we are going to see changes in the complexion of the workforce the likes of which none of us would have ever imagined in the not too distant future.

If safety and health pros want to increase their relevance in the workplace now, they need to focus on what they can do to reduce costs and improve productivity. Let the PR folks deal with sustainable growth. In this highly competitive world we live in now, this is ALL business leaders are thinking about. Sure, they do not want to hurt or kill anybody, but is this one of the top five concerns they worry about? In some cases, I am sure this is the case, but on the whole, I believe there is so much pressure on making profits that this concern has fallen into the category of "It's being taken care of."

We have reached a point where some very difficult decisions have to be made with respect to our future as safety and health professionals. More regulations will inevitably lead to certain death of the safety and health professions in this country because there will no longer be a need for them.

Advice to the wise, have an updated passport and be willing to move overseas because that is where the safety and health jobs of the future will be.

Thanks for asking,

Jim
Enhancing Performance and Value through Systems Thinking