Taking Personal Responsibility for
Safety – Master Builders

Steve Duff, ALCM
Holmes Murphy and Associates

The “Why”...

• Too often, people are unwilling to accept responsibility for their actions. There is a need to blame someone other than ourselves.

• Remember the woman who spilled McDonald’s coffee in her lap?

• This was Liebeck v. McDonald’s Restaurants, also known as the “McDonald’s coffee case”.

McDonald’s coffee case

• In 1992, a 79 year old woman was a passenger in a car and ordered coffee from the drive through.

• She placed the cup of coffee in between her knees and pulled the lid off towards her to add cream and sugar.

• The coffee spilled, causing burns in her lap area.
McDonald’s coffee case

- She sues McDonald’s, claiming that the coffee was “defective” because it was too hot.

- McDonald’s loses the lawsuit, even though there was a warning on the cup stating “Caution – contents are hot”.

McDonald’s coffee case

- She was awarded 2.86 million, with 2.7 million of that being punitive damages. After appeals, she later settled out of court for an undisclosed amount under $600,000.

- ABC News called this “the poster child of excessive lawsuits”.

- Who was really responsible for this?

Personal Responsibility

- With all the government safety regulations as well as company policies, it is easy to forget that safety is primarily a personal responsibility.

- Safeguards can be installed on each piece of equipment.

- We can attend training sessions and be told of safe ways to work.
Personal Responsibility

- However, none of these things can ensure freedom from accidents unless we want to prevent them.

Personal Responsibility

- We need to realize that our own actions determine whether accidents happen.

- Until we accept responsibility for these actions, injuries will occur.

Personal Responsibility

- Ask yourself this…who puts tools and equipment into motion and controls their movements?

- Who but ourselves can control the placement of our bodies, the movement of our arms, legs and eyes?

- Most importantly, who controls the activity of our brains?
Being Accountable

• Machines do not reach out and bite.

• Tripping hazards don’t grab a person’s feet.

• Hand tools don’t slice into flesh by themselves.

• Yet, judging from statements people use to describe their injuries, one would think that the tools and equipment they use are alive.

Being Accountable

• It’s apparent that the people who make such statements are not fully aware that they are accountable for their own actions.

• It is difficult to help people who refuse to accept this responsibility.

Being Accountable

• When each individual employee brings an acceptance of personal responsibility and accountability into the workplace every day, everyone’s risk of injury drops dramatically.
Example

- Consider the employee who hurts his / her back while moving a heavy object.
- Accident investigation reveals that the employee should have asked for assistance, as was stated in the company safety rules. (Such as getting help with objects over 50 lbs.)

What caused the accident?

- An irresponsible individual would lay the blame somewhere else, instead of with themselves, saying "nobody was available or nobody would help me".
- A person who accepts responsibility would agree that they should have planned ahead, and asked for help.
- See the difference?

Let’s look at another example

- An employee uses a ladder that he knows is too short. He convinces himself that it will be OK since he will be on the ladder for just a limited amount of time.
- A person who accepts responsibility realizes that the risk of getting injured is much, much greater standing on top of a ladder, and takes whatever action is necessary to get the right ladder.
Reasons why the injury occurred.

• “I am just a go-get-it-done kinda person”.

• “I am too busy to follow all of the safety rules”.

• “I thought I could do it myself”.

These are just a few reasons irresponsible people use to absolve themselves of personal accountability when things go wrong.

Moving on…

Accepting Responsibility

• Accepting responsibility is a sign of maturity.

• It means that we firmly believe that it is up to us to do everything we can to prevent accidents.

• No one else can accept our safety responsibility for us.
Accepting Responsibility

- When safety responsibilities are rejected, someone must cope with the results.
- This will include the injured, their family, doctors, nurses and your employer.
- By accepting and practicing safety responsibility, you help to ensure that you will go home in the same condition that you came to work in.

Co-workers – Watch out for them.

- Personal responsibility also means that you have a responsibility to others.
- You have a social and moral responsibility to your fellow workers.
- Their health and well being should be just as important as yours.

Maintaining Focus

- Are you always 100% focused on the task at hand?
- Probably not, because life gets in the way.
- You may be thinking about getting little Timmy to football practice, or your sick mother, or worrying about paying for that leaky roof.
In the Line of Fire

- Studies have shown that 48% of the time we are not focused on the task at hand!
- When we are not focused on that task at hand, we can put ourselves in the line of fire.
- You are more apt to have an accident when you are not focused.
- Example: Texting while driving.

Co-workers – Watch out for them.

- Remember, your co-workers have the same worries, and may not be completely focused. Watch out for them, and hopefully they will watch out for you.

1 thing you can do

- I could give you a laundry list of things you should remember about personal responsibility.
- But this is a safety presentation (yawn…right?) and you are only going to remember so much.
- So I am going to give you 1 thing to focus on regarding personal responsibility.
Eliminate Shortcuts

- Shortcuts are great when you want to get from one place to another quicker.
- Taking shortcuts in our work is inexcusable, intolerable and will eventually lead to devastating effects. It will catch up to you.
- Taking shortcuts means that you are not 100% committed towards safety.

Eliminate Shortcuts

- No one ever plans to have an accident.
- An accident by definition is an unplanned event.
- No one wakes up in the morning and drives to work thinking, "I will hurt my back today, so I better stretch before I start work.”
- That’s why it is so important to have a personal commitment towards safety and to eliminate shortcuts.

Eliminate Shortcuts

- What has ever been gained by taking a chance?
- Think about a time when you risked your personal safety.
- Have you ever driven a car when you have had too much to drink?
- That is a shortcut because you were too lazy or stubborn to find some other way home.
Eliminate Shortcuts

- What did you gain in that situation?

- A minute of time, an ounce of convenience?

- Now honestly ask yourself if it was worth it.

Eliminate Shortcuts

- Decide not to ask for help when lifting a heavy object? – **Shortcut**

- Decide not to use eye protection when grinding or using a saw because they are a hassle? - **Shortcut**

- Improperly use a ladder, or not use fall protection? - **Shortcut**
After all that, who needs "dumb blonde" jokes
Safety Rules

- Safety rules for these issues and others came about because enough people hurt their back, lost their sight, and were injured from a fall to cause these safety rules to be written.

- So, if you could focus on just 1 thing, make it this…

- Eliminate shortcuts!

What else can you do to help?

- Stretch prior to starting the work day.

- Any kind of stretching will help.

- Don’t athletes stretch and warm up prior to physical activity? Why don’t we?

- Take just 5 minutes every day to stretch. Make it a habit. (It generally takes 21 days to make or break a habit.)

Know your limits

- Ask for help when lifting heavier objects.

- Rarely do people get hurt when they have help.

- Don’t take the shortcut and try to do it yourself.

- If lifting by your self, lift with your legs.

- Do NOT twist while lifting. This is a major cause of back injury.
Proper lifting

- Back straight, butt down.
- Elbows close to the body, if possible.
- Whenever lifting something overhead, consider getting help – this is a major cause of shoulder strains.
- Get a good grip.

Look for hazards

- Look for issues that may cause an accident, and report / correct them.
- Don’t assume “someone else will take care of it”, or:
  - “It’s not my responsibility”.
  - This could include…

Look for hazards

2. Fall protection issues. Guardrails. Floor openings.
3. Ladders in poor condition. Having the wrong ladder.
4. Bad extension cords.
5. Lack of appropriate guarding on equipment.
6. Workers without proper PPE.
True Story For You...

- Jeff was a lineman from Chicago. He wanted something different for his family so he moved to rural Iowa. Instead of working with 200 coworkers, he now worked with 15. One of the first things he did was to bring his young son Ben, to meet his coworkers and to take Ben for a ride in a bucket truck.

True Story

- Driving home, Ben looked at his dad and said, "Dad, I don’t like you being a lineman." Why Jeff asked. "Well dad, it looks dangerous."

  Well, Jeff responded, "it is, but as long as I don’t take any shortcuts, nothing bad can hurt me."

  This must have been enough for Ben, because he didn’t say another word.

True Story

- Months passed and Jeff was notified that he and his crew mates would respond to damage from a hurricane in the gulf.

  After leaving, Jeff found a note in his suitcase. It read, "To Dad, I love you. I will really, really miss you. Don’t take short cuts. Love, Ben."
Eliminate Shortcuts

- Funny how some things stick with us, like that message did for Ben.

- I hope that message sticks with you as well.

Questions?