



## Acceptable vs. unacceptable risk: A disconnect on, off the job

In our lifetime, the world of acceptable and unacceptable risk has evolved drastically. Consider in your personal life: What risks did your parents take, all with good intentions, that would be viewed as appalling or even illegal today? When I was 2 years old, my mother hired a taxi cab driver for the day to babysit me while she and her friends were off exploring a cave while on vacation in Spain. When I was 10, I made a trip across the U.S. and back while lying on a couch made for the bed of my father's truck with a camper top (a truck I learned to drive when I was 12).

My parents are amazing and intelligent people who made rational decisions that made sense at the time. Whether we as a society or the environment we live within has changed, the fact is times are different. What we once considered as acceptable practices are no longer viewed as such today. We recognize this as our tenure increases in work environments and especially when we are fortunate to become parents.

I've been blessed with three daughters, who, at the time of this publication, are ages 17, 9 and 6. A few months ago,

my oldest daughter started her first job. If you live in or have visited Texas, you will know how serious we take our barbecue, so I couldn't be prouder that her first employment was with a very well known barbecue restaurant. Prior to her first day, she received a safety orientation that included the need for slip-resistant footwear. As I was shopping with her to procure this PPE, I found myself reflecting on my very first job I had when I was 11.

I had my heart set on a new bike. My father instilled in me a very strong work ethic. If I wanted the bike, I was to earn it. Chores around the house were already viewed as a responsibility, so I sought out a paper route. I obtained three. Two papers were delivered on Tuesdays and Thursdays and another on Sundays. All of the papers were delivered around 4:30 in the morning. I would bundle them and set out on the bike I wanted to upgrade from to deliver them to my customers' doorsteps.

I learned a lot about customer service, hard work and providing value to afford what I wanted. Safety, however, wasn't really considered. There were no pre-trip risk

assessments, discussions about PPE or safety observations to complete. The town I lived in at the time had less than 1,000 residents. And things were a lot different than they are now, even in small town America. Not many parents today would allow their children to deliver papers at 4:30 in the morning, even though paper routes are still, surprisingly, not covered by child labor laws.

When we become parents, we look at life differently because we all want better for our kids than we had it at their age. We realize risks we were once exposed to are viewed as unacceptable today. But there are also risks — like texting and talking on the phone while driving, which have become the leading cause of teenage deaths — that didn't exist when many of us were learning to drive. Becoming a parent doesn't ensure the ability to recognize risks with our kids; many adults also drive distracted. To ensure the safety of our kids, we must see risks through a different lens. And when we become leaders within organizations, this lens must carry over to our work life.

A disconnect between what is viewed as acceptable risk versus unacceptable risk

with our kids is really no different than the potential disconnect that might exist between levels within a business. If the thinking isn't consistent, the practices won't be either. Our role as parents and/or leaders is to help those we care about change the way they think about hazards and risks, both up and down the organizational and family hierarchy.

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