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## Lessons from a music video: From saving children to improving workplace safety

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Reminiscing about some of the impactful music videos my wife and I remember from the 1980s and '90s, my wife's top choice was a song by the band Soul Asylum. I had never seen it. Watching it impacted me so much that I researched, learned something new and thought differently.

With our efforts to improve occupational safety, this article explores what we can take away from this important video that helped save and return twenty-one of the thirty-six missing children featured.<sup>1</sup>

### The video and its impact

Certain songs transcend their role as mere entertainment in music and become powerful catalysts for change. One example is "Runaway Train" by Soul Asylum, a hauntingly beautiful ballad with an equally impactful music video. Released in 1993, the music video for "Runaway Train" played a crucial role in raising awareness about missing and exploited children, ultimately leading to tangible outcomes in terms of rescues and recoveries.

Soul Asylum collaborated with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) to create a music video featuring images and information about missing children. The video, directed by Tony Kaye, showcased the faces and names of real missing children, urging viewers to take action and report any relevant information. The impact of the "Runaway Train" music video was profound.

As the video gained widespread attention through extensive airplay on MTV and other music channels, it reached millions of viewers. The compelling visuals, coupled with the song's emotional resonance, struck a chord with the audience. Viewers began recognizing missing children from the video and provided valuable tips to authorities.

Several success stories emerged as a direct result of the video's reach. Many children featured in the video were located, rescued, and reunited with their families. The video essentially became a powerful tool for generating leads in cases of missing persons, demonstrating the potential of music and media in mobilizing communities for a noble cause and some new takeaways for efforts to improve safety performance and culture.

## Lessons learned and takeaways

The success of “Runaway Train” teaches us valuable lessons about the intersection of art, media and social impact. It emphasizes the potential of occupational safety professionals and experts to leverage their platforms for meaningful change. By partnering with organizations dedicated to social causes, experts can amplify their message and contribute to critical societal issues. Here are the seven most important takeaways:

**Visibility matters:** The video’s success in locating missing children highlights the importance of visibility. In safety culture, ensuring safety protocols, hazards, and best practices are highly visible, engaging, relevant, meaningful and memorable can significantly improve overall safety performance.

**Utilize technology for communication and safety:** The collaboration between Soul Asylum and NCMEC leveraged the medium of music videos and television to communicate a critical message. Similarly, organizations can use modern technology, such as social media apps, wearable devices, digital platforms and communication tools, to effectively convey safety information to employees, create awareness, promote adherence to safety protocols and enhance safety oversight and communication.

**Timely reporting and response:** In cases of missing children, timely reporting and response are crucial. Similarly, prompt reporting of near-misses, hazards, incidents and injuries is essential for occupational safety. A swift response allows for effective intervention, mitigation of potential risks before they escalate, and a more effective recovery when unwanted events occur.

**Empowerment through information:** The video empowered viewers by providing information and encouraging them to act. Likewise, in safety, providing clear information about potential hazards, safety procedures, and emergency protocols empowers employees to make safer decisions. Education and training programs contribute to a knowledgeable and proactive safety culture.

**Emotional connection enhances impact:** The emotional resonance of the song contributed to the video's success. In safety initiatives, connecting with employees on an emotional level can enhance their commitment to safety. Emphasizing the human aspect of safety, such as the well-being of colleagues and the potential impact of incidents, enhances awareness, can create a more profound and lasting impression, and reinforces the importance of safe practices.

**Community involvement and collective responsibility:** The video engaged the community by making the viewers active participants in the search for missing children. Similarly, fostering a culture of collective responsibility in the workplace, where all employees at all levels are involved by actively identifying and addressing safety concerns, ensures everyone plays a role in safety and contributes to a safer environment.

**Partnerships for a common goal:** Collaboration is critical, both in saving missing children and solving complex safety challenges. Soul Asylum collaborated with NCMEC to achieve a common goal. Similarly, companies can partner with safety experts, regulatory bodies, and other stakeholders to strengthen their safety programs. Collaborative efforts bring diverse perspectives and resources, contributing to a more comprehensive approach to safety.

## A blueprint for future endeavors

“Runaway Train” by Soul Asylum is a testament to the transformative impact that music and visual storytelling can have on society. Beyond its role as a chart-topping hit, the song and its accompanying video played a pivotal role in saving lives and reuniting families. The music video underscores the collective power of communities. The viewers of “Runaway Train” became active participants in the search for missing children, illustrating that mass awareness, when channeled appropriately,

can lead to powerful and positive outcomes. This collaborative effort between specialists and experts, media, and the public serves as a blueprint for future endeavors where creativity and compassion converge to address critical issues, from saving missing children to improving occupational safety.

1. Keppler, N. (2023, August 8) *Did the “Runaway Train” Music Video Really Save 21 Kids?* Slate.  
<https://slate.com/culture/2023/08/runaway-train-music-video-soul-asylum-kids.html>

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