

Safety culture goes far beyond work

Written by Shawn M. Galloway
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What do most people care about, more than anything else in the world? I've asked this question of audiences in several countries. I always receive some humorous answers, such as, "My Boat!" "My stamping collection!" "My garden!" After the chuckles subside, the serious answers start pouring in, followed by confirming nodding heads throughout the group. "My kids." "My spouse." "My parents." "My grandkids."

To most people, the thing they care about more than anything in this world are the members of their family and their family's safety. Yet, as companies continue to [enhance their safety](#) processes with the common goal of ownership, the employee's family is rarely mentioned.

[Off-the-job safety topics](#) have increased over the past few years, with topics such as home use of personal protective equipment (i.e., eye, hearing, hand protection, etc), ladder safety, and personal equipment maintenance. While these topics are helpful, there is an opportunity to progress further. Helping people see how their involvement in safety in an industrial setting applies to their personal lives changes the lens in which people view life.

[\[Watch: Companies looks for better ways to measure safety success\]](#)

Anthony

Three years ago we were asked to help an organization enhance their existing safety committee. The site was better than average in safety performance. They had a safety committee focusing on a lot of activities. However, they weren't producing additional improvement. We set an objective to help focus their efforts.

The enhanced committee (all volunteers) was made up of great individuals who represented all levels of the organization. They had recently chosen a very respected and influential hourly employee to be the safety committee chairperson.

Anthony was a great guy and one of those individuals who always had a smile on his face. The way he spoke with others, regardless of their tenure or level in the organization, truly demonstrated a mentor-like quality and, most importantly, a passion for safety. He was an obvious choice to lead this committee. Over the years, their collaborative style was very successful in helping the site significantly improve in safety performance.

Several months ago, my partner (Terry Mathis) and I were asked to revisit the site to assist in a new initiative to further develop the site's supervisors. We requested some time with the committee to check in with them and help review their current focus. Truth be told, they were great people and we just wanted to spend some time with them.

Over the years, some of the individuals who participated on the committee had rotated out, allowing others an opportunity for involvement. Yet Anthony remained the chairperson due to

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repeated requests of his fellow employees. At the end of our discussion, Anthony asked for some additional time with us as he had something he wanted to share.

Anthony told us how he had considered getting off the committee. He told us how his passion for safety had never decreased and how he was for years spending his own time at home researching new ways to improve safety.

He was a busy guy, both at work and at home with his teenagers, Allan, 18, and Jennifer, 16. Anthony said that he was prepared to persuade us during his visit of his desire to step down and leave the committee. He felt that, as we had helped the committee improve, this was the perfect time.

It was barely noticeable, but at this moment Anthony's voice began to slightly change. He got a little quieter and stated, "Then a couple of things changed over the weekend." Anthony told us the following story.

It all clicked

"On Saturday, I was doing some work in the garage. I asked my son to help me by mowing the lawn. After a little persuasion he agreed. He pulled the lawnmower out and I heard the engine turn on. A few minutes later, I heard it cut off and he walked into the garage. Thinking there was something wrong with the mower, I asked him, 'What's wrong?' He said, 'Oh nothing, I just forgot my PPE (Personal Protective Equipment)'. He went over to the tool bench and grabbed the eye protection and ear plugs. I thought for a second, 'Wow.' But what had just happened had not yet clicked in my mind until Sunday.

"Early Sunday afternoon, my daughter, Jennifer, asked my wife if she could ride to the mall with her friends. An hour or so later, Jennifer waved goodbye and she was off to do what teenage girls do at the mall: spend their father's money. It was about fifteen minutes later when I see the door open and Jennifer walk in. I yelled over to her in a joking manner, 'Back so soon?' She replied to me, 'I'm not going anywhere with those idiots. None of them will wear their seatbelts.' It wasn't until that very moment that it all clicked. I finally realized what my involvement in safety had really provided me."

Anthony then told us how he was prepared to leave the committee, but after what happened over the weekend, there was no way he would leave. He laughed and said, "They will have to pull me off this committee, or lock the doors when they meet. I'm in it for the long run."

Beyond work

Anthony had been involved with safety for many years prior to joining the committee and he never really made the connection that what he learns in safety at work transfers home to his family.

If an employee is injured off-the-job, they are just as absent as if the injury occurred at work. Moreover, if a close family member of an employee is seriously injured, they will also be absent.

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The safety tools and techniques we provide people help them change the lens through which they look at life. When someone learns a safety strategy, they see things differently. Anthony recognized this after many years of involvement in work-related safety activities. He saw things differently and shared what he saw with his family.

If we can help all employees recognize early-on how safety applies to the things they care about most, we create not only a safety conscious culture, we help the culture create safer families and communities.

(Editor's Note: The author had just shared his experience on how safety culture at work is influencing the way we live our lives outside of it. How has your workplace safety culture affected your personal life? We welcome readers to share their stories and help spread the word on safety. E-mail the editor at mdeguzman@clbmedia.ca. We'd love to hear from you!)

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