

To LIVE Our Own Health and Safety Advice

With a significant amount of humility, I share this story. I value the opportunity to learn from life's lessons and hope you will benefit from mine, rather than experiencing a similar close call.

I have been fortunate to have addressed hundreds of audiences in keynote talks, workshops, and private conversations coaching clients, saying the following in many of these engagements: "Health doesn't equal the absence of visible disease, and thus safety excellence does not equal the absence of incidents." Readers who listen to my weekly podcast, *Safety Culture Excellence*®, have heard this exact quote many times. If only I would have listened to my own advice.

Saturday, Sept. 15, 2012, started out wonderfully. I met some friends for coffee and a drive, all to share in a similar hobby with some wonderful individuals. Following this adventure, I ran some errands and later in the day decided to stop by a local pharmacy for a vaccine.

My sister was due to give birth in a few weeks. With whooping cough coming back, it was and still is advisable for all those planning on being near a newborn to be vaccinated against it. As I was waiting on the opportunity to receive this pleasure, I noticed a blood pressure machine to my left.

Because I was standing in line at this busy location, a seat and what should have been a familiar test appeared to be a sufficient way to pass the time. With the button pressed, the pressure around my left bicep increasing, I waited. My reaction to the test result probably didn't help calm the number presented to me. I could feel the perspiration immediately forming on my forehead. My name was called. Slowly rising, I walked to the chair, accompanying a lady putting on rubber gloves, and barely remember receiving the vaccine; an appropriate example of adding insult to injury.

Leaving the pharmacy and thankful for the smartphone in my possession, I quickly queried Google for normal blood pressure. Searching for my numbers within the returning website's graph, the term "Seek Immediate Attention" appeared to blur out the additional numbers and meanings.

I didn't live what I would have considered at the time to be an unhealthy lifestyle. While I do travel quite a bit, which makes eating on time and healthy difficult, it is easy to be drawn toward the appealing convenience of fast food. Moreover, with my complex schedule, I reasoned, "I just don't have time to exercise." Standing outside the pharmacy, what should have been recognized as warning signs became boldly obvious, and I felt embarrassment for thinking, just 10 minutes prior, that I felt fine.

Imagine visiting your doctor on your annual visit and telling the physician, "I feel great; there is nothing visibly wrong with me. I must be in great health!" The doctor surely wouldn't send you on your way. Rather, the physician would run multiple tests, checking your breathing, heart rate, and other invasive diagnostics to determine your risk factors.

I immediately sought help from an emergency clinic. I was placed on blood pressure medicine and received the advice from the physician that if I did not make changes to my lifestyle — not just lose 10 percent of my weight and eat healthier — I would be on medical intervention for the remainder of my life. At that exact moment, I

made the decision to LIVE differently.

Turning the Corner

In the past four months, I have lost 18 percent of my weight, reduced two sizes in slacks, and have exercised every single day, sometimes twice a day. Further, I haven't touched fast, fatty, or sugary foods. I have more energy and, mostly, I'm proud of the decision and lifestyle I have chosen. Thankfully, I no longer require medication. With all changes providing early, good results, sustainability is always the remaining challenge. LIVE (Listen, Indicate, Validate, Execute) is a framework I developed to help me keep on track with better decisions, behaviors, and measurements of progress, as outlined below.

Listen. While human health and occupational safety are certainly not easy or simple, they are similar in that we do know a tremendous amount about how to prevent illnesses and occupational injuries, and both are better managed proactively than reactively. While we professionals dedicate our lives to helping others remain healthy and risk-free, we should listen to our own advice and demonstrate we practice what we preach. What other behaviors might conflict with what is preached in health and safety?

Indicate. We must remember that results indicators are not prescriptive nor predictive. We must seek out indicators of performance: risk indicators, not just activities. We must seek those things that provide insight and validate that our activities are creating the desirable performance outcomes. How well you eat and how many times you take your blood pressure are all activity indicators, but they tell you nothing. Your blood pressure, how many pushups and chin-ups, and how much energy you feel throughout the day are performance indicators. What are the performance indicators that provide valuable insight to you?

Validate. Test the leading indicators often and modify activities to better understand what interventions produce desirable results. Like culture and performance in safety, our bodies respond differently and evolve past the benefits of interventions when tolerances or diminishing returns are obtained. Moreover, how you validate these indicators to provide frequent performance feedback can further motivation and enhance the chances of sustainability.

Execute. Stop finding excuses and do it. You are responsible for your personal health and safety outside of work, no one else. Changes in lifestyle will last only when the decision to change has occurred, and you are the most important individual to hold yourself accountable.

It took what the physician called "a very close call" for me to realize the importance of what I teach. Writing this article and publicly sharing my embarrassing story is another way to hold myself accountable. I hope you will consider the implications of this framework and how it can be applied to business and personal decisions, helping you and all whom you support to live a better, healthier, risk-free existence, both on and off the job. **OKS**

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