

TOOLBOX TALK



AWARENESS ON THE JOB

by Wally Raedeke

Over 80% of all workplace injury arises from worker behavior. We make mistakes, errors in judgement or simply do not have our full attention on the job and something happens. There is also a tendency to get so focused on getting the job done that we do not recognize the obvious.

A few years ago in the main shops there was an incident where a fairly new worker fell into a hole in the floor and required several stitches in his leg. The opening was well flagged off and the whole affair seemed a mystery. The post incident interview went something like this: So, you saw the caution tape? "Yes". And you do understand what caution tape means? "Oh, yes." And you stepped over the caution tape and fell into the hole? "Yes, that is pretty much what happened." Either this guy was a complete moron or there was some other explanation.

On further questioning, it turned out that he was on the end of a tag line at the time. He was so focused on keeping the plate steady that the consequences of stepping over the caution tape did not register. At first this seemed unbelievable. However, some recent research on workplace injury confirmed that focused concentration on a task reduces the capacity to recognize obvious hazards. And a significant number of workplace injuries result from this kind of inattention.

This applies directly to vehicle operation such as forklifts or even pickup trucks. There is a felt sense of pressure to get something done, we are driving totally wrapped up in the job and do not even see the person walking in the path of travel. Every year there are countless incidents like this.

Are there pressures and intense focus in our jobs? You bet. But it is how we deal with the pressure, how we handle the intense focus that is important. Now and again we have talked about the four second reset as a way of attuning ourselves to the hazards around us. Sometimes all it takes is a big breath when we sit behind the wheel of a vehicle. In truth, it is some conscious act of getting outside of the pressure or job focus that prevents this type of incident. How we do this is our individual preference or way of psychologically handling the job demands here.

There is an old story about a man who is riding a very fast horse. As he gallops past a bystander the person shouts, "Where are you going in such a hurry?" The man answers, "I don't know. Ask the horse." The very same situation happens with many of us at work. We get caught up in the busy day. Direct the horse once in a while and you won't ride over one of your co-workers or fall into a hole.

Source: [www.http://safetytoolboxtopics.com](http://safetytoolboxtopics.com)