IMMEDIATE THREAT/SECONDARY THREAT

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When I started to work in the local Steel Mill, I had to attend a day of pre-employment training that included a 1/2 day of Safety Training. The training included the standard time that most companies review with inexperienced new employees. The instructor went over the expected hazards we would face, the company's Safety Work Rules and the required Personal Protective Equipment. Like most of the other young future employees, I only paid attention to about half of what was being presented. After all, I was going to live forever and accidents happened to other people.

After the classroom portion of the training was complete, we were then taken out to the Primary Melt Shop. They were getting ready to poor a Heat and we were all going to get an up close and personal view of what we were getting into. I remember that the Plant was dark as we entered the side door to the Melt Shop. They had set up a partition to protect those entering the Plant and we all were told to stand behind the partition until they started pouring the steel.

At the designated moment, the Instructor had us all walk out from behind the partition and we walked into another world. Then hot Steel was pouring out of the Furnace into a large ladle, the whole place looked like it was on fire. Sparks were shooting to the ceiling. I suddenly realized that if we didn't do all of the things were taught in the class we were going to die. I couldn't put my hard hat on tight enough, I couldn't pull my gloves up far enough and I couldn't push my glasses on tight enough and I looked down to make sure my shoes were tied tight.

I couldn't imagine working in this department and not suffering a serious injury. The good news was that none of the new inexperienced employees that were starting with me that day would be assigned to the Melt Shop. This department required seasoned, mature employees that understood the importance of protecting their safety.

I worked for that company for six years and during that time there were no serious injuries in the Melt Shop even though I was convinced that this was the most dangerous place in the Company to work. I came to realize that most employees recognized and respected dangerous situations and realized that not paying attention or taking unnecessary chances could cause serious injury and/or death.

These situations were not the primary reason why most employees got hurt. We perceive dangers differently and respond accordingly.

Extremely dangerous situations are called **Immediate Threat**. The average employee recognizes that there is a substantial risk of being injured by performing particular tasks or activity. Self preservation becomes a part of the equation and we take the extra steps to protect ourselves or avoid these situations. Supervisors don't usually have to plead with, conjole, beg or threaten employees to be safe.

Most accidents are not caused by Immediate Threats but what is called a **Secondary Threat**. These situations are either not perceived by the employee as dangerous or the employee doesn't believe he/she will be injured by performing this task or activity. These situations are relatively common and many times go unnoticed and aren't seen as a real danger. Therefore, they go uncorrected. Employees get used to them and perform the task or activity as part of their daily routine.

Every time an employee gets away with this activity, the easier it becomes to do it in the future. Eventually, the tasks or activities are done automatically without the employee even thinking about the task. It becomes a habit and once it does it becomes extremely hard to break later on.

Companies that have successful Safety Programs realize it is not the big things that hurt employees but it is the little everyday things that go unnoticed and unreported. It is simple things that make all the difference, these include:
*   Effective Training   *   Providing the proper PPE
*   Housekeeping   *   Having Safe Job Procedures
*   Observing employee Safe Work Bhavior   *   Providing Safe Tools & Equipment
*   Listening to employee safety concerns   *   Enforcing Safe Work Habits
*   Recognizing & rewarding safe work behavior   *   Counseling employees on safe work behavior
*   Establishing Safety as a Key Management Core Value and Communicating daily

Changing employee safety behavior is one of the hardest things management is faced with. That is why it is critical to understand what types of Secondary Threat situations exist and then establishing the procedures to eliminate them and prevent them from happening in the future. Is it easy? No! Is it doable? Yes! Will it pay off? Yes! Safe work environment improves morale, reduces injuries and saves money. Sounds good to me.

If you have any questions about your Safety Program or need any assistance, please call me at 1-800-356-1274.