



Looking Back On 40 Years of Safety

BY WARNELL A. VICKERS

In 1978, I began my career as a Safety Officer for Miami Dade County in Florida. Now after forty years, I am retiring as a Safety Manager and starting the next chapter of my life. It's hard to believe that I started my career in industrial safety only seven years after the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) was established!

I have had an amazing career journey with many challenges and changes along the way. Without a doubt, the biggest changes in safety resulted from the technological revolution. The introduction and widespread use of the internet made a major impact on every industry and it also transformed the safety profession. Today, a safety professional's inspections and investigations are much more efficient thanks to on-line access to just about any regulatory or guidance data base, professional webinars, smart phones, iPads and a host of other technology.

However, one thing hasn't changed in forty years and that is that safety professionals understand that safety is built on the principle of being proactive instead of reactive. Nevertheless, most public sector safety professionals will tell you that it is an on-going battle in to get their top level administrators and management to view accidents and the resulting employee injuries and property/equipment damage with anything other than a reactive perspective. Most public sector organizations have a long history of not allocating the resources necessary to address safety issues in a proactive manner. I have come to accept that as

safety professionals we many never be able to fully change the reactive safety actions of public sector organizations and may always have to overcome obstacles and challenges as we promote proactive safety principles.



As safety professionals, we have developed the vision to see what is often invisible to the eyes of others: hazards in everyday situations. We have also been given the responsibility to influence behaviors and put in place safety measures that while they might seem unnecessary to others, they may someday be needed.

Often, we make the mistake of thinking that just because it is the safe thing to do, people will be motivated to do the right thing. If that was true no one would be overweight, we would all be in great physical shape. Unsafe acts and hazards would never occur. The truth is that safety professionals know that there will always be a need to find new ways to connect with people at all levels and communicate the benefits of safety.

The safety community is tasked with the responsibility of being messengers on how to save not just lives, injury and pain, but also an organization's time and investment. Safety professionals help everyone recognize the importance of making improvements to make the work environment a safer and better place.

What is the face of Safety? Who is the face of Safety? The National Safety Council has the green cross as an emblem of safety. There is a need for the safety community to further establish a face for safety nationally and locally. Cellular phone companies, insurance companies, and car companies have established ways that people recognize their product and can connect with it. Moving forward, the safety profession must find ways to make safety more interesting, stimulating, and exciting so that people recognize and connect with safety!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Warnell Vickers has over 39 years of experience as a Trainer and Safety Professional. Mr. Vickers is the Acting Manager of the Office of Safety, Risk Management Division at Miami-Dade County and administers a comprehensive Safety and Health Program which provides oversight and guidance for management, employees and operations of Miami-Dade County. Mr. Vickers manages a staff of Safety Professionals who conduct safety inspections and investigations to comply with Federal, State and Industry Safety and Health standards. He conducts safety training on a variety of topics including: Bloodborne Pathogens; Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation/AED; Computer Ergonomics; Driver Improvement; First Aid; Forklift Verification; Lifting Safety Material Handling and Awkward Movement; Distracted Driving; Hazard Communication; and Respiratory Protection.



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