

## Are We Focused on What Matters?

*Green Cross for Safety Awards* remarks for Debbie Hersman

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Hilton Chicago

How many of you wear glasses or contacts?

How many remember what it felt like the first time you put them on?

Were you surprised by how much you couldn't see before?

If you're anything like me, you probably got lulled into thinking – that's the way the world is supposed to look.

It's normal not being able to read road signs in the dark. It's normal not being able to distinguish individual leaves on a tree.

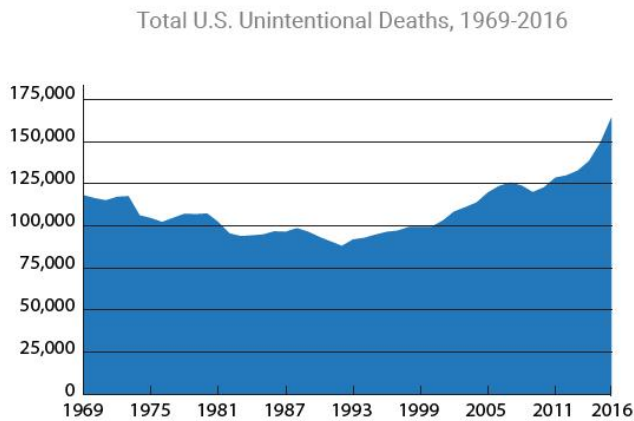


But the small act of putting on my glasses for the first time helped me see things as I should have seen them before.

At least that was my experience being nearsighted.

If you're getting older like my husband Neil, you might feel like your arms just aren't long enough anymore.

Either way, over time we become de-sensitized. Things go out of focus so slowly we don't realize we're actually losing our vision.



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When it comes to safety, we are becoming blind to everyday hazards that have made preventable injuries the 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of death.

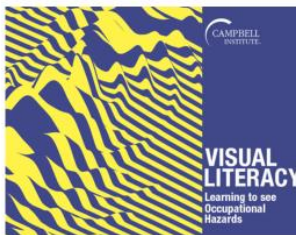
For the first time in recorded history, more people in the prime of their lives are dying from preventable causes than ever before.

We are becoming complacent.

We are rolling back protections for workers, repealing helmet laws, increasing speed limits, and turning a blind eye to everyday risks like falls.

For everyone in this room, our job is to make sure safety is not an afterthought, but the first thing we think about, and the first thing we look for.

The problem is, we're often not seeing the whole picture.



I'm happy to see that Brian Kennedy, the president, director and CEO of the Toledo Museum of Art, and deputy director of the museum Dr. Adam Levine are with us tonight.

Together with Owens Corning and our own Campbell Institute transformed visual literacy into an innovative safety training program that helps workers see hazards clearly.

Let's do a visual literacy exercise:



What do you see? Can anyone spot the hazard in this image?



What do you see now?

Let's go back to the black and white image.



I bet you all saw the leopard jumping out of the screen after you saw the image in color.

The amazing thing about visual literacy is that once you learn to see the hazard, it's much harder to un-see it.

Beyond just spotting the hazard, visual literacy directs us to ask three key questions:

- What do you see?
- What does it mean?
- And, most importantly, what are you going to do about it?

It's not likely that we'll ever come across a leopard in our everyday lives, so here's an example that may be more familiar.

One out of every four Americans have been directly impacted by the opioid crisis. And for the people in this room who have lost someone they love, it's personal.



The opioid epidemic is now the most significant public health crisis of our time.

But the signs were hidden in plain sight for well over a decade before we started paying attention.

As with any public health risk, whether we are at work, at home, or on the road – it starts with recognition.

The problem is - people don't see something familiar, like a bottle of pills, as potentially deadly.

We know a prescription after an injury is often how people get hooked, setting off a chain reaction that has devastated families and communities across the nation.

So the National Safety Council followed the data to make that impact visible to others.

We made sure policymakers could see it clearly with our Prescription Nation report, grading the states on how well they address opioid prescribing and treatment.

We made sure employers could see it clearly by creating a substance use calculator and working with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

**(ANIMATED PILL WALL GIF)**

We made sure the public could see it clearly through a traveling memorial bringing them face to face with a wall of pills representing tens of thousands of people lost to unintentional overdoses.

Their personal stories have opened the eyes of millions since we launched right here in Chicago in November.

I want to thank Energy BBDO and our hometown team for their 20/20 vision and for helping others see the risks of opioids as we do.

Once we truly see something, we cannot un-see it.

Our Green Cross Award finalists, and the safety professionals in this room not only see the hazards, you do something about it. Your impact, once recognized, cannot be ignored.

Thankfully, we have learned to see and address many risks in our lives.



Construction workers at 30 Rockefeller Plaza in New York City, 1932



Raise your hand if you can identify at least three hazards in this famous photo.



Construction workers in Los Angeles, working on the Wilshire Grand Tower, 2016



Let's try a more modern version.

What hazards remain?

At work, we don't see that contributing factors like distraction and fatigue have an extraordinary impact. Are we focusing on the right risks?

Let's try another one.



This is for all you traffic safety folks in the room.



Let's take a look at the same intersection. What's changed?

Many Americans see roundabouts as frustrating or confusing.



The road on the left is familiar, but in a safe system, roundabouts eliminate the opportunity for a really serious crash to occur.

Everyone drives slower, there's no light to beat, and traffic only moves one way, with little chance for a head-on or side impact collision.

In a typical intersection, there are at least 32 possible ways a crash can happen, but a roundabout cuts that down to eight.

For those of you in workplace safety, it's the hierarchy of controls – you do everything you can to eliminate or design out the hazard.

Really seeing roadway safety is our commitment with the Road to Zero Coalition.

We know we can't eliminate all crashes tomorrow or in a decade, but you can bet we're focused on how we can achieve zero roadway deaths by 2050.

Every single day, we lose more than one hundred people on our roads, and we appear to be blind to this. We've become desensitized. These deaths don't make it to the headlines of national news. But they impact thousands of lives every single day.

If you have teens at home, you know prom season is in full swing.

When my husband and I went to our senior prom 30 years ago, we rode with friends and we didn't see the hazards.

But then my future sister-in-law was in a crash on the way to prom.

In slow motion, as the car was rolling over, she watched as the sequins from her dress floated down like snowflakes.

Luckily, she wasn't hurt. But today, I know that half of all teens will be involved in a car crash before graduation.

When I see prom pictures posted on Facebook, my first thought is – I hope they have a safe ride home.



My son Taylor just attended his senior prom. I was so pleased that his friends reserved a bus and a professional driver to make sure they arrived safely.

As you can imagine, being my kid is not easy. I told him not to stick his head out of the windows or stand in the aisles, and all about the terrible things that can happen on a party bus. I encouraged him to be a good passenger and keep his friends safe.

Because once you see the hazards, you can't un-see them.



When you're a safety professional, you don't solve the problem once. You keep looking at it, always trying to find new ways to see and eliminate the risks.

Tonight, we celebrate the work of safety professionals and innovators.

Keeping each other safe means we all have a responsibility in our own lives, at work, at home, and on the road.

We must focus to bring the hazards into the spotlight, so that they are no longer invisible.

Remember our three guiding questions: What do you see? What does it mean? And what are you going to do about it?

The first step toward change is the hardest to make. But only from a distance.

When your focus is clear, taking the first step is simple.

All you have to do is put on your glasses. And then act.