

TITLE: 2179 ACCIDENTS AREN'T JUST ONE OF THOSE THINGS

LENGTH: 20 MINUTES

PRODUCTION YEAR: 2003

PROGRAM SYNOPSIS:

With 20 years of experience as a firefighter and paramedic, Martin Lesperance has treated thousands of injuries and medical emergencies that have resulted from the poor choices and decisions people make every day. As a best-selling author and popular safety speaker, Martin takes his experiences and molds them into entertaining and thought-provoking safety presentations. Some of his unique safety insights might just save your life.

In this program, Martin shares his experiences and stories with a live audience. He addresses many important safety issues that all employees need to hear, including the following:

- Accidents aren't "just one of those things;" the injuries we call "accidents" can be prevented.
- We all have reasons to work safely other than just ourselves.
- Why we must wear our personal protective equipment.
- If you notice a dangerous situation, fix it immediately.
- Think of the repercussions of your actions.

SHOOTING LOCATION: An industrial setting with speaker and audience.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES: After watching the program, the participant will be able to explain the following:

- What "ripple effects" result from an injury;
- Why we must think of the repercussions of our actions;
- Why wearing personal protective equipment is so important;
- Why a dangerous situation should be fixed immediately;

INSTRUCTIONAL CONTENT:

MICHAEL'S STORY: THE RIPPLE EFFECTS OF AN INJURY

Martin opens the presentation with the story of Michael, a husband and father of two. Michael was cleaning his gutters when he suffered a tragic injury. He had been getting down to reposition the ladder every few feet and then scaled it again to scoop out the leaves. When he got near the end of the house, Michael hesitated—he knew he should get down and move the ladder again—and decided to take "a little bit of a risk." He leaned over too far, lost his balance and the ladder tipped over. Michael landed on a wooden fence around a flowerbed below. He suffered several shattered vertebrae and a severe spinal injury that resulted in permanent paralysis.

Martin tells the audience, "That day things changed forever. There is a ripple effect when an accident happens." The injury affected every aspect of Michael's life: his role as a husband, lover, father and employee. "When a person chooses to work or play in an unsafe manner, they are committing a very selfish act. Not only is injury prevention for the person who's injured, it's also for the people left behind," says Martin.

"It was because of Michael and other people like him who I've attended to in the past twenty years that I set a goal to try to prevent injuries from happening to people. And I do it because I really don't like seeing people hurt," Martin continues.

"Workplace injuries are especially disturbing because people don't wake up in the morning to go to work so they can lose a hand, become paralyzed or die. People go to work for a paycheck so they can provide for their families," says Martin.

Martin goes on to say that his two daughters are the reason he works and plays safe, and notes that everyone has reasons for staying safe.

"Today I want to talk about three things:
How injury prevention is about more than life and death;
The misuse of the word "accident"; and,
Some general safety tips to remember the next time you consider taking a risk."

INJURY PREVENTION IS MORE THAN LIFE OR DEATH

Martin states that people tend to think "everything's going to be okay" when an injured person's condition is upgraded from critical to serious. It really means that the person stands a good chance of not dying, but doesn't mean everything is going to be okay. The person might never walk again, sit up and feed himself again or may never recognize his spouse or children again.

"Michael's injuries certainly didn't kill him, but when he hit the ground things certainly weren't okay," says Martin.

Martin asks the audience how their families would be affected if they were seriously injured, in constant pain and had to get around with a walker. "How would you be affected if your spouse was in that condition? Would it cause extra stress on the family and financial problems? You bet it would!" Even professionals can make horrible mistakes, according to Martin.

TIP: Think Of The Repercussions Of Your Actions.

FIREFIGHTER STORY: EVEN PROFESSIONALS MAKE DEADLY MISTAKES

To illustrate his point, Martin recalls an incident where a woman had called 911 for help because her baby was at the bottom of the family pool. He notes that firefighters and EMT's respond differently to incidents that involve children by hoping the call has been exaggerated and the child is going to be okay. A fire truck that was responding with the ambulance arrived first and the firefighters rushed to the scene to find a motionless child at the bottom of the pool. Without hesitation, one of the firefighters dove into the pool to save the child's life. The pool was empty and the firefighter died instantly from a broken neck and a severe head injury.

While this incident shouldn't have happened because the firefighter was a professional, every day professional electricians, truck drivers, carpenters, iron workers, lift truck operators and countless other workers make the same kind of deadly mistakes. Martin then gives several examples of workers who have been killed due to their errors in judgment.

"Even though you have the proper safety equipment, even though you have the proper safety training, you still have to use the best safety tool that you have—and that is your brain. You have to think!" Martin exclaims.

HYDROGEN SULFIDE STORY

Martin provides another example. A hydrogen sulfide leak occurred at a plant. All of the plant employees had a minimum of 10 years experience and had been trained in the use of safety equipment and what to do in an emergency. One of the employees got a whiff of the gas and went down. Co-worker after co-worker saw the problem and went in to rescue the others. Finally, someone tackled the last would-be rescuer and said, "No, let's get our self-contained breathing apparatuses and take the proper precautions." They cut the gas off, sounded the alarm, took the appropriate precautions and got the people out. Two workers died.

"This didn't have to happen. Even if you have the proper safety training and equipment, you have to stop and take a good look at the situation, especially in emergency situations," Martin says.

ACCIDENTS AREN'T "JUST ONE OF THOSE THINGS"

Next Martin talks about several incidents that people may regard as accidents, but really aren't accidents at all. First he describes a news report with an interview of a friend of five teenagers killed in a car wreck. The girl being interviewed said the accident was tragic, but "it was an accident, just one of those things."

Martin tells the audience about other so-called accidents:

- A guy carrying a ladder came in contact with a power line and was electrocuted;
- A flag person didn't see or hear the dump truck that ran over her;
- A machine operator who thought he was faster than the machine put his arm in to unplug it and lost his arm up to his shoulder;
- A three-year-old boy pushed through a screen and fell to his death from the fourth story of an apartment building;
- An 18-month-old child was killed when his father backed over him in the driveway;
- A five-year-old boy drowned in a dugout on the farm where he lived.

While we may hear in the news about a teenager walking into a school and shooting two fellow students, we probably don't hear incidents like the ones Martin mentions. After all, they were just accidents, just one of those things.

Martin points out that these are not accidents and not "just one of those things." They didn't have to happen. The definition of accident includes the words "unpredictable" and "unavoidable." He concludes, "You could call these 'fatalities,' 'tragedies,' or 'incidents,' but don't call them accidents because they were not. They were not just one of those things."

TIP: Wear Your Personal Protective Equipment.

Martin uses a story about his friend's son Shaun to illustrate this point. Seventeen-year-old Shaun had just gotten a job on a construction site and was complaining that the hardhat he had to wear was too uncomfortable. Martin painted a scenario for Shaun to explain why he had to wear the hardhat. A guy on the second story of the construction site lets a hammer fall. If you're wearing your hardhat, you're probably not going to be seriously injured. If you aren't wearing your hardhat, it's going to fracture your skull and rupture the blood vessels around your brain. The blood vessels are going to bleed under pressure and a huge puddle of blood is going to form around your brain. If you're lucky, they get you to a hospital so a neurosurgeon can relieve the pressure. Your condition is upgraded from critical to serious.

After spending several months in the brain injury ward at the hospital, you get transferred to a place similar to a nursing home. You'll be tied to a wheelchair because you don't have muscle control anymore. They take you back to your room that you share with three people. Just before you go to sleep, this thought goes through your head every night: "My God, I have another 50 years of this."

"That's why you wear a hardhat, Shaun," explained Martin to the teen.

"Personal protective equipment only works if you wear it. It does no good hanging on a wall or sitting in a locker. It's there for a reason. Use it!" Martin tells the audience.

TIP: If You Notice A Dangerous Situation, Fix It Immediately.

To expound on this tip, Martin uses a story that hits close to home. Martin was going to work one evening when he noticed a patch of ice in front of his house. "This is dangerous; I should fix that," he thought to himself. He didn't fix it and later that night his neighbor called and told him that his wife had fallen and broken her arm. His wife, carrying their daughter, slipped on the same patch of ice that Martin had noticed earlier and broke her shoulder in three places.

"It would have taken 20 seconds to get sidewalk salt and make a dangerous situation safer. It would have taken Michael the same amount to get down the ladder, move it over and finish his job in a safe manner," says Martin. While Michael is still paying for his mistake, Martin says he's lucky he's not.

Martin asks what would have happened if his daughter's head had hit the concrete first. The ripple effect would be incredible and the guilt would still be with him because he knew he would have been responsible.

The presentation continues with Martin tying his experience into a workplace scenario. He asks the audience how they would feel if they had seen someone on an unstable ladder and chose to just walk on by. Then 10 minutes later the person suffered a fall and was taken to the hospital in critical condition. After the person's condition is upgraded to serious, you go to the hospital and tell him, "If there's anything I can do to help you, let me know." Even worse, you go to the funeral and look at the person's children and spouse and offer your condolences. Everyone is thinking this has been a horrible accident, but it's just one of those things. "You have a hard time looking the spouse and children in the eye because you know it wasn't an accident, wasn't just one of those things," says Martin.

IMPORTANCE OF PREVENTING INJURIES

You don't have to be a genius or have a high IQ to prevent injuries, according to Martin. "To prevent injuries, you have to stop and slow down, and think about the repercussions of your actions. Who else will be affected if I choose to take a silly risk?" he asks.

He closes the presentation by asking audience members to put his safety tips into action so they can save time, money, tears and maybe their lives. "Preventing injuries is not just about life and death; it's about quality of life."