

TITLE: THINK AND BE SAFE

LENGTH: 18 MINUTES

PRODUCTION YEAR: 2007

PROGRAM SYNOPSIS:

While working as a firefighter and a paramedic, Martin Lesperance frequently hears injury victims say “I just wasn’t thinking” or “I didn’t think.” If not thinking about safety can cause injury, pain, suffering and death, thinking about safety could prevent harm; thinking about safety could prevent injury, pain, suffering and death. In this live presentation, Martin uses his on-the-job experiences to show that taking a moment to think and act can have a huge impact on our lives and the lives of our families.

SHOOTING LOCATION: An employee meeting area

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

- Why we must think about the repercussions of our actions;
- Why we must continually think about safety while performing a job;
- Why we must think about how our actions impact others;
- Why we must think about the warning signs of potential injuries and take the time to fix the problem.

INSTRUCTIONAL CONTENT:

“I DIDN’T THINK”

- As a firefighter, paramedic and safety speaker, Martin Lesperance has seen a lot of injuries firsthand. One thing he hears a lot from people injured at their homes is “I just wasn’t thinking” or “I didn’t think.”
- He also hears the same thing at the workplace. “I didn’t think I needed my hardhat” or “I didn’t think anyone would get hurt; we were just goofing around.”
- Even though these injury victims didn’t think then, they are going to have a lot of time to think about their mistakes and a lot of time to think about their injuries.
- If not thinking about safety can cause injury, pain, suffering and death, thinking about safety could prevent harm; thinking about safety could prevent injury, pain, suffering and death.

MAN OVERCOME BY GLUE FUMES

Martin tells the story of an injury victim he attended as an example. A man was in his mid-30s and he was laying some tiles in the basement of his house. The glue he was using to lay the tiles had a warning label. The warning label said the fumes are highly flammable, to use in a well-ventilated area and to keep it away from an open flame. As the man was working, the fumes built up and they crept across the basement to the hot water tank. The hot water tank has a pilot light.

There was a huge explosion. The man became fully engulfed in flames. He ran up the stairs and out to the front yard. Fortunately for him, a neighbor was out and he got his garden hose and was able to put the flames out. And as the paramedics were loading him into the ambulance, Martin will never forget what he said because through his charred face he looked at them straight in the eye and said, “Who’s going to look after my family? Who’s going to look after my family?”

“Maybe he didn’t think the warning labels applied to him. Maybe he didn’t think of reading the warning labels. Maybe he didn’t think about all the things that could go wrong before he started the job but I’m sure if he would have thought of those things, he wouldn’t have been burnt,” says Martin.

He says he knew thinking about safety could prevent injuries. “Thinking about your safety—it makes sense so I bounced it off some people in the safety field and I bounced it off a lot of people in the shops, factory floors and other work places I visited. And guess what they told me? ‘Think about what? What should we think about to keep us safe?’ So, I realized I’d have to be a lot more specific,” Martin says.

Martin then came up with some very generic ideas, great for keeping us all safe, no matter what kind of work we do or no matter what kind of activities we participate in while off the job.

IDEA #1: THINK OF THE REPERCUSSIONS OF YOUR ACTIONS

To illustrate this idea, Martin tells the story of a man who fell off of his roof and suffered several serious injuries. Once very active, the man was then bedridden and didn’t handle his injuries well at all. He became addicted to the pain killers he was taking and began to drink heavily. When he couldn’t be convinced he needed help, his wife packed up their kids and left him. His alcohol and drug abuse increased and he ended up taking his own life on a day when his kids decided to pay him a visit. They were the ones who found him.

“Who ever dreamed that eight months earlier, when he was working on his roof, whether he was in a rush or whether he just wasn’t thinking about his safety, but who ever dreamed that his mistake would end up costing him his life and devastating the lives of his kids? Now that’s the ripple effect of an injury,” says Martin.

While this is an extreme example, Martin goes on to discuss more common repercussions that affect thousands of people each and every day: mind-numbing and excruciating pain, loss of mobility, loss of self worth, financial loss, not being able to play with kids or grandchildren and loss of quality of life.

"What we've just done is taken a few seconds to think of the repercussions of an injury. We've just thought about the repercussions of our actions. Now, if we do this on a regular basis, if we do this before we start a job, if we do this before we get behind the wheel and if we do this before we climb a ladder or any other task where we could be injured, we will be a lot safer," concludes Martin.

IDEA #2: THINK BEFORE YOU ACT

Martin says we may have heard this idea a million times before and still wonder what we are supposed to think about before we act. One thing we should be thinking about is making sure we're going to complete a job safely before we start it.

"For example if you're going to carry an item from one area to another area, don't just go up, pick it up and start carrying it. Take a couple of seconds and think about how you plan to lift it. Is it heavy? Or you have to get help or maybe you're going to use an assist device. What route you plan to travel when you're carrying it? Are there any hazards along the way? Is there anything you could trip on? And where are you going to put it when you get there?" Martin asks.

Thinking the job through from start to finish is a great way to stay safe, according to Martin. The more complex the job, the more thinking and planning you may have to do. That's why many jobs have written procedures that are designed to ensure every part of the job is considered before the job is started, especially controlling the hazards, he says.

"Written procedures help you think because when we think a job through from start to finish, when we gather the proper tools together, when we wear the proper PPE and we know and use the procedures that are necessary to finish the job safely, we will be a lot safer," says Martin.

IDEA #3: MAKE THINKING AN ONGOING PROCESS

Thinking about a job from start to finish is a great way to stay safe, but we also have to continually think while doing the job, according to Martin. "Have you ever been driving somewhere and missed your turn? You probably have. Now, when this happened, when you actually went by your turn, what were you thinking about? I'll bet you were thinking about something else. You weren't thinking about your driving. Some of us may have even gone through a red light because we failed to continually think about the task at hand: our driving," says Martin.

He says that there are equally disastrous results from distracted working. He uses a person working on a punch press on a Friday afternoon as example. The guy has a fishing trip planned for the weekend. Before you know it, he's looking down his hand that has every bone in it smashed.

"When you notice your thoughts starting to wander away from the task at hand, when you notice your thoughts starting to wander away from your safety, you have to make a conscious effort to reel those thoughts back in. And this doesn't matter if you're driving a car, working a punch press or cutting up some vegetables in the kitchen," Martin says.

IDEA #4: THINK ABOUT THE RATIO OF RISK TO REWARD

To illustrate this idea, Martin uses an example of a driver taking his family to the beach in heavy traffic. Traffic is slow, so the driver pulls out to make a pass, gets halfway past the vehicle and realizes he or she doesn't have enough time to make the pass safely. A couple of miles later, the driver tries to pass again with the same results.

"Think about this. Is the ratio of risk worth the reward? In the event that something goes wrong, well, you could end up wiping out your entire family or you can cause them such devastating injuries they will never be the same and they might have a hard time forgiving you for doing this to them," says Martin.

Martin uses a second example to make his point. "Maybe you're at home or maybe you're at the workplace. You're doing a job and you don't want to wear the PPE. Maybe you thought it was too uncomfortable, maybe you thought it would take too long to go and get it, to put it on. Suddenly, you lose an eye. You're now blinded in this eye for the rest of your life and you have to wear a glass eyeball or a patch to cover up the ugly hole where your eye used to be. Was the ratio of risk worth the reward? Was it worth it to save those 20 seconds? You tell me."

IDEA #5: THINK ABOUT YOUR IMPACT ON OTHERS

Martin notes that even if you don't get hurt, you can still do damage. For example, when your children see you driving without a seatbelt or riding without a helmet, you are setting an example that will have a huge impact on them and the choices they make for the rest of their lives.

Another example is the impact more experienced workers have on younger employees. "Let's say you have 25 years on the job and they just hire an 18 year old worker and the boss tells you to show them the ropes. Remember back when you were that age, on your first job? I know I do and I was quite naive. And I wanted to impress the other workers so I would take risks and I would take chances that I wouldn't even consider taking now. I was young and I was impressionable. I watched what the older workers did. See, now you may be the more mature worker. The new hires are going to be watching you. So do them a favor. Show them the right way to do things, show them the safe way to do things. And whatever you do, don't teach them how to kill themselves," says Martin.

"So think about the example you are setting because you are setting an example. Make sure it's a good example, not a bad example," he concludes.

IDEA #6: THINK ABOUT THE REASONS WHY IT WON'T HAPPEN TO YOU

Martin says he doesn't know what it is about human nature that makes us think we're so different from everyone else and what makes you think that you are so different from me. "For example we all know that in a car crash, our faces can go through the windshield, resulting in 400 stitches and having every bone in our face smashed. We all know that even a small amount of electrical current can stop our hearts and we know how fast a flying object can take out an eye.

"So why do you think it'll never happen to you? Are you immune from the laws of physics that somehow you won't be thrown through that windshield? Does your heart have a greater ability to withstand electrical current? Does your face have some kind of invisible force field that's going to deflect any incoming objects?" he asks.

"I don't think so and deep down inside I know you don't think so either. You see, physically you're no different from me or the thousands of other people who are hurt every week. See, your flesh will rip and bleed the same as everyone else's, your bones will break the same as everyone else does and you can die the same as everyone else does," he concludes.

IDEA #7: THINK ABOUT THE WARNING SIGNS

Often people experience the warning signs of an impending heart attack and do nothing about it. They then go into cardiac arrest and die. Martin says that we often see the same kind of warning signs in the workplace. "Some people call them near misses; I actually don't like the term "near miss" because after all you were nearly hit, you weren't nearly missed, so I prefer to call them near hits. But the difference between this type of close call and a devastating injury or even death is a fraction of an inch or a split second."

"For example, you step out into an aisle way and you almost get hit by a speeding forklift or you step on a wet bathroom floor and you go for a fall but you manage to catch yourself right before you actually fall. Each of these near hits could have resulted in injury or death but they didn't, at least not this time. So when something like this happens, stop and think about what really happened. And stop and think about what you can do to prevent it from happening again," continues Martin.

While you may have to get help to stop the problem, don't just ignore it. Fix it or report it because you never know when it's going to "raise its ugly head and hurt someone," according to Martin.

ACTING ON OUR THINKING

- We not only have to think about our safety, but we have to act on our thinking.
- You can sit in a corner and think about safety until you're blue in the face and you won't be any safer if you don't put those thoughts into action.