It Only Takes a Moment: Five Great Reasons To Work Safe
by Deb Potter, PhD, CMC and Carl Potter, CSP, CMC

Have you ever thought about what would happen to your family if you were seriously injured at work? This is not something most of us like to think about. But, stop for a moment and consider how many times a day you do something unsafe at work, something that could result in an injury.

THE MOMENT THAT CAN AFFECT THE REST OF YOUR LIFE
For an office worker, it may be something as simple as getting in a hurry and forgetting to close a file drawer. In the next moment, that simple action could result in a trip and fall that breaks a bone and lands you in the emergency room where you will be placed in a cast that you’ll wear for the next six weeks.

For a construction worker, it may mean deciding not to wear personal protective equipment such as a hardhat. In the next moment, you could find yourself the target of a falling object that injures your head and leaves you with serious brain damage that dramatically changes the rest of your life.

For an electrical worker, it may mean something as serious as choosing not to wear fire-retardant clothing when working around high voltages. In the next moment, you could find yourself with serious electrical burns that put you in the burn unit of the hospital for months of painful therapy after which you’re left with permanent debilitating scarring.

For a professional driver, it may mean choosing to drive too fast for the conditions. In the next moment, you could find yourself sliding off the road resulting in a crash that leaves you with permanent damage to your legs, preventing you from ever returning to your driving job. Regardless of the circumstances, you could find yourself the victim of your own decision.

Sadly, when a worker makes the poor decision to get in a hurry, take a short cut, or not follow safe work procedures, the family can be a victim, too. The impact of a workplace injury on a worker’s family can be significant. The family is often affected by the cost of medical care and the impact of recovery time and rehabilitation. The family often has to deal with physiological and psychological changes as well as vocational and economic impacts.

FIVE REASONS TO TAKE A MOMENT FOR SAFETY
Consider the following five reasons to do whatever it takes to avoid a workplace injury.

1. Your spouse may not make a great nurse.
   If you are injured, much of your care will probably depend on the support of your family. You may have to depend on family members for transportation, administration of care, communications with insurance companies, and emotional support. Your spouse or other family members may not be the most compassionate
people in the world when it comes to taking care of you if you are injured — especially if they know you could have avoided the injury in the first place.

2. An injury can really stress you out.

If you are injured, the psychological impacts can be significant for you and your family. Workers that are injured on the job are often angry, depressed, and stressed. Unhealthy behaviors such as smoking, excessive use of alcohol, or drug abuse can result. Each of these, if not dealt with properly, can strain family function and relationships. Other members of the family may face some of these same psychological impacts. Imagine being injured and having a stressed out family. That’s not a pretty picture.

3. Think about what you’ll miss out on if you are injured.

A seriously injured worker often can no longer function normally. Often these individuals cannot perform routine activities or are limited in their capacity to perform personal or domestic functions. Picture yourself not being able to walk across the room or hold your child or to take care of your own needs.

4. Mondays will have a whole different meaning.

Imagine not being able to go back to work after being injured. Those days of getting up and going to do productive and enjoyable work may be over. Vocational function is often impacted by workplace injuries. Depending upon many factors such as time to recover and the completeness of the recovery, a worker may have to be temporarily placed in an assignment that will let him or her return to work or the injured worker may be permanently disabled and unable to return to work in any capacity. The impacts are not desirable: loss of income, loss of sense of belonging, and loss of productive contribution.

5. Show me the money.

If you are injured, the economic impact to you and your family can be extreme. Depending on the severity of your injury, an injured worker may realize a minimal or quite significant economic impact. OSHA reports that, on the average, persons who are partially disabled from a workplace injury lose about 40% of their income over five years. A worker who is not permanently disabled due to injury is estimated to lose $8000 in income per injury over a 10-year period. Some workers mistakenly think that workers’ compensation insurance will cover their expenses if they are injured. While certain medical costs and a portion of income are covered, an injured worker’s expenses are often much higher after an injury. Additionally, the injured worker’s spouse may have to give up a job or reduce work hours to help provide care. Some sources estimate that a permanently injured worker may give up as much as $1 million, depending on the age and type of work when the injury occurs.

SAFETY ONLY TAKES A MOMENT

It often only takes a moment to think about what it means to do the task at hand safely. Assess your surroundings, wear the proper clothing, use appropriate protective equipment, and apply safe work procedures. All in all, wouldn’t you agree
that it is worth whatever it takes to keep yourself safe at work so you can continue to
do work that you enjoy and that provides a good income for your family? After all,
the goal is to go home every day to your family without injury.

###

Carl Potter, CSP, CMC and Deb Potter, PhD, CMC work with organizations that
target a zero-injury workplace so everyone can go home to their families every
day without injury. As advocates of a zero-injury workplace, they are speakers,
authors, and consultants to industry. For information about their Simply
Seamless Safety™ Services, contact them at Potter and Associates