

BECAUSE THEY CAN

By Gary Hanson, President
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Recently, I was meeting with a client and he was discussing an accident to one of his employees who hurt his back when he jumped into a shallow trench. The trench had recently been concreted for a footer for a new building. My client didn't understand why the employee would jump into the trench when there was an access ladder 10 feet away. The employee reported that the accident had aggravated pre-existing arthritis. This claim could result in a potential Long Term Treatment Plan and a large future Reserve issued by the Bureau of Workers' Compensation.

My client asked me why the employee would not use the ladder? My response was **Because He Could**. The employee made a decision, do I do it the safe right way or do I do it the easiest quickest way. Unfortunately, all too often an employee makes the latter decision. Why? **Because They Can**. Safety comes down to each independent decision our employees make. Left to their own choice, all too often they make the wrong decision.

I understand that it is impossible to monitor every decision an employee makes. I also understand that employees don't want someone looking over their shoulder all day long. There has to be a middle ground. Ronald Reagan had a great quote when he was confronting the Soviet Union "Trust but Verify". The same thing applies with employees. We should expect them to make the safe right decision, but we need to actively monitor their behavior to ensure they are making the right decisions.

Safety is not automatic, so we have to assume that if employees can make the wrong decision they will. Why? **Because They Can**. That is why there has to be clear defined expectations for safe behavior. This needs to be communicated constantly to all employees:

- * Regular Safety Observations should be conducted
- * Safe Procedures developed and Safety Rules enforced

Safety is a learned behavior, but like every other positive behavior it takes practice and repetition until it becomes automatic. If not, unsafe behavior will become a part of an employee's daily routine. It will be repeated over and over, if it is easy, quick and the employee doesn't recognize a serious consequence.

This is a basic tenet of human behavior. I explained this to my client and advised him that employees will make bad decisions not because they are bad employees or want to get hurt but **Because They Can**.

If you have any questions or need assistance with your Safety Program, please give me a call at 1-800-356-1274.