

## Consequences of Split-Second Decisions

Many years ago I was visiting the San Francisco area. While there, I wanted to see the Golden Gate Bridge from a vantage point that was on the other side of a heavily traveled highway which had multiple lanes of traffic going in both directions. I stood and analyzed whether or not I could make my way across the highway on foot. I didn't want to have to drive away and find an exit where I could return to the other side. I couldn't believe how much traffic there was but decided to risk running across the highway. I was young, athletic and single at the time.

The goal was across the highway - a great view of the bridge and the surrounding area - and I was determined to get there. I was focused on what I needed to do. I watched the traffic going back and forth and then made a split-second decision to dash across one direction of the traffic when there was a brief lull. I got to a narrow median. It became immediately obvious to me that I was standing dangerously close to fast moving traffic from both directions. Twice someone honked their horn excessively at me which was startling and reinforced the fact that I had put myself in a dangerous place. I was sure they probably thought that I was some drunken fool standing in the middle of a highway with nowhere to go.

Being pinned down like that as a result of my split-second decision was not a good feeling. Nearly five minutes went by before I saw a brief opportunity to race across the other lanes of traffic. I had made it to the other side but at what risk? When your heartbeat is elevated and you are in danger, adrenalin is pumping out in the fight or flight scenario. I freely admit that I was foolish to do this and felt even more foolish that day when I later saw a pedestrian tunnel that passes under the highway which I would use to get back to the side where I had parked my vehicle after enjoying the view I had sought. Impulse can be a dangerous thing.

On the one hand, you could say that I only put myself at risk upon making that split-second decision; however, what if I had started to cross the highway and a concerned driver swerved or slammed on their brakes? I very well could have been the causative factor for a chain-reaction accident that resulted in other people being injured or killed. I was fortunate, lucky, call it what you will, that day because neither I nor anyone else got hurt. It was a lesson I never forgot.

And it is also worthy of note that the drivers that honked their horns to display their anger at my presence in the median were also acts that were potentially life threatening to me and others if I had been so surprised as to fall or jump back and thereby create a cascade of reactions.

My single split-second decision that day put many people at risk based on impulse. My desire for my convenience - to avoid driving past and returning by a different exit to get to the other side of the road - could have had disastrous results.

While active as a Project Safety Manager, one of my greatest concerns had to do with people making split-second decisions without having really thought through the risks and possible negative consequences involved with what they were thinking about. Over the years, numerous “accidents” stemmed from people doing something quickly without having sufficiently thought through the hazards or dangers of the task . . .

For more answers and insight, I invite you to look at our book, *Safety Under Construction—A Quest for Safety Perfection Utilizing Inventive Thinking where we discuss in depth the psychological aspects of safety that include how we are affected mentally, emotionally and physically*. It is a must-read for individuals and anyone who wants to dramatically improve the Culture of Safety within your organization and make unlimited strides for safety success.

Go to: <http://www.SafetyUnderConstruction.com> in order to obtain a great sense of this newly published book on safety and risk. There you will see a representative preview and reviews of a book that needs to be read, taken to heart and shared. Lives depend on it.

Brion K. Hanks  
Retired Project Safety Manager