

The Danger of Complacency in the Workplace

Would you think that skilled journeymen are the safest workers? An interesting truth in construction is that these people are often the most susceptible to injury and harm. Such a contradiction to expectation is critical to understand and which needs to be resolved in order to achieve Safety Perfection in all work environments.

I know you're wondering, how can someone be at the peak of their skill set and yet statistically be the most likely to have an "accident"? One root cause is complacency. In our book *Safety Under Construction* we go into depth and talk about complacency's relationship to unconscious competence where someone has achieved automatic high-skill.

You have heard of multi-tasking or auto-pilot. Example: you are in your car driving down the road and before you know it you just drove 10 miles and were not conscious of what transpired during your drive. That is running on auto-pilot. It shows the power of our brain to keep us on track during the drive while our mind is elsewhere and yet there was very real danger due to not being present or consciously aware of your surroundings in order to have the split-second ability to safely react to some circumstance that could put us in danger.

Now imagine a work environment where multiple operations are taking place and a worker who is highly trained is on auto-pilot. This worker does not hear a shout out that a crane is bringing a load overhead. The load shifts and begins to partially fall. Another worker screams at the auto-pilot worker to get out of the way. The person snapped out of this unconscious mode and was barely able to move in order to keep from being injured by the falling material. What happened? Complacency was at work here and proved to be a dangerous thing in this instance.

That muscle between our ears is powerful but must be managed by each of us when we know we are in an environment that has degrees or elements of danger. Sustained attention is one key element for avoiding complacency. Situational awareness is another. Using a buddy system to watch out for each other is a good tool. Literally stopping the activity and taking a deep breath can allow for one to re-focus on the task at hand. Taking a moment to physically step back from the task will allow one the ability to look at the operation, first with safety in mind, and determine if any adjustments need to be made.

While complacency is a complex and contradictory problem in construction we wholeheartedly view it as an opportunity for advancing safety in the workplace. The fact is there's a relationship between perception of risk, confidence, making mistakes and being safe.

For a much more in-depth discussion of complacency, go to Chapter 24 – The Complacency – High-Skill Contradiction in 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.

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