

The Communicator

Empowering
action to
advance OSH

NOVEMBER 2016

A TECHNICAL PUBLICATION OF ASSE'S TRAINING & COMMUNICATIONS PRACTICE SPECIALTY

Caution vs. Careful

Careful Decisions Can Lead to Cautious Behavior

By Howard Spencer

The word *caution* loosely means care taken to avoid danger or risk. Various symbols are used to alert us to the need for caution. For example, the yellow diamond on a point sign is used on highways to alert drivers to a minor hazard that may not be obvious. A yellow rectangle is used in industry to draw attention to workplace hazards, perhaps designed to trigger the action of looking for a hazard. Or, it could be that to avoid injury we need to do something wise or responsive. All meanings call for cognitive behavior. The thinking about the consequences of our actions in regard to the new knowledge of a hazard's existence is the essence of cautious behavior. But does the link between the hazard and our awareness of it automatically clear up the adverse consequences? Or by being promptly notified of the hazard is the correct preventive action obvious?

What characterizes a cautious action? A caution action is careful, well considered and sometimes slow or uncertain.. In a Nov. 11, 2011, *Huffington Post* article,



"Careful v. Cautious: One Helps You—The Other Holds You Back," Lisa Earle McLeod wrote:

The adjectives that we use to describe ourselves set the tone for our decision making. The difference between cautious and careful is that cautious is an emotion, a fear-based emotion at



©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/ONNES

that. Being careful is an action; they're things you can do, like gathering data, getting additional input, studying experts, etc. Being cautious can make you afraid, but being careful can make you confident.

Asking people to be cautious stalls decision-making. Asking them to be careful gets them more engaged.

I ask you to consider this: Cautious is good, but only if it causes us to stop and pay attention to the probable effects of a soon-to-be-undertaken act. We must first recognize the hazard and then decide to take an action you now feel confident will keep you safe. The

warning is not enough. Somehow, we have to share the knowledge of best practices that makes the completion of a task in a safe manner likely. The key to safety is for each of us to have access to enough timely knowledge to allow a thoughtful decision. When this works we can have confidence that our careful decision will lead to cautious behavior. ■

Howard Spencer, CSP, CHCM, is a senior risk control consultant at J.A. Montgomery where he provides consulting to public sector clients. He is a professional member of ASSE's Penn-Jersey Chapter and the Public Sector Practice Specialty.

Are You a Zipper Pull?

By Howard Spencer

A zipper is a simple but important device. The modern-day zipper is based on interlocking teeth; it was invented by Swedish-American electrical engineer Gideon Sundback in 1913. The slider is operated by hand and moves along the rows of teeth. Inside the slider is a Y-shaped channel that meshes together or separates the opposing rows of teeth, depending on the direction of the slider's movement.

Zippers form a strong yet flexible bond between two objects that at times need to join forces but can come apart without damaging either side, which is analogous to our work as safety practitioners. Sometimes management balks at the expense of safety activities because the return-on-investment may be difficult to quantify. Sometimes workers feel that safety activities infringe on their personal freedoms. As safety practitioners we want to mesh these two opposing forces into a strong, flexible and collaborative bond. Each side has opinions and at times we find ourselves in the middle bearing the bite from both sides. Yet, if we skillfully move the process forward and guide the meshing we can keep the fabric of our safety culture together. It may be a hard pull but we must steer the two sides into a working relationship.

The slider cannot do its job unless it is in motion. A zipper pull is a small but vital piece of the apparatus and without it being fastened to the slider, the zipper does not function. No one thinks of the importance of a zipper unless there is a gap, then everyone notices. A

gap in our programs often gets noticed only when an injury occurs. When an organization is torn apart by an incident, someone has to step up and guide the organization forward to heal the pain and bring all sides back into a working relationship.

Safety practitioners must be prepared to bridge those gaps. We must move the organization forward by bringing all parties together, mending the hurt and not placing blame. We must have the wisdom to know which way to move and the tenacity to keep pulling. Moving the pull is a hands-on job and we must personally get a firm grip to ensure that motion occurs. Management provides the power but it must know when to pull.

When a zipper pull tab does its job correctly, it will disappear until the next time a need arises. Zipper pull tabs are never flashy and often go unrecognized unless they are missing, then the whole garment is not serviceable. Next time you use a zipper, think what a wonderful invention Sundback made and how well it functions even in the dark and the harshest of environments. Use it as an illustration, that by joining forces we can together solve even difficult problems. ■

Howard Spencer, CSP, CHCM, is a senior risk control consultant at J.A. Montgomery where he provides consulting to public sector clients. He is a professional member of ASSE's Penn-Jersey Chapter and the Public Sector Practice Specialty.



©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/REDSTALLION



OSH Professionals & Open-Source Safety

By Howard Spencer

The phrase *open source*, coined by Tim O'Reilly, describes the nature of systems that are designed for user contribution. The most exciting work tends to happen in the space where two or more disciplines overlap, or it happens where one intrepid designer or team simply decides to combine them. The term *the architecture of participation* is also used to describe the nature of systems that are designed for user contribution. Architecture of participation is a Web 2.0 concept in which a community of users contributes to the content or to the design and development process.

The open-source license encourages a shared community approach to the development, extension and patching of open source software. Most open-source projects have a dedicated group that moderates and directs the core software development and ensures that needed new features are developed, bugs are fixed and that supporting documentation remains current.

The compiler translates the source code into the binary language that it can read and execute. Compilers not only make it possible for computers to run the program, but also make the programs more efficient by optimizing the file sizes and checking for errors.

In general, open-source software gets closest to what users want because those users can help create it. It is not a matter of the vendor giving users what the vendor thinks they want—users and developers make what they want, and they make it well. This is because its shared

development harnesses the brilliance of those around the globe who are continually developing, improving and evolving its core. It is a worldwide community, coming together to build something awesome, regardless of distance, language and culture.

The world of knowledge is quite opaque; people with a problem do not always know where to look for the solution. So they spend a lot of time and money discovering something that already exists. If someone describes the problem in terms of its applications, the only solutions are from people working in that particular industry. OSH professionals must consider this: Is this not descriptive of many of the challenges we face in safety?

Many times things that work in one application could work in another if only the second group knew about the first group's solution or vice versa. It is important for groups to join in the network and share their expertise. ASSE provides a great opportunity to share expertise. As safety practitioners, we have a social and maybe a moral obligation to seek out those who can profit from the results of our battle-tested solutions. Do not sit on the sideline; get in the game and share your knowledge. ■

Howard Spencer, CSP, CHCM, is a senior risk control consultant at J.A. Montgomery where he provides consulting to public sector clients. He is a professional member of ASSE's Penn-Jersey Chapter and the Public Sector Practice Specialty.

©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/LEO WOLFFERT





Network on
LinkedIn



Find us on
Facebook



Read
ASSE's blog

- Training & Communications Information
- International Resource Guide
- Journal of SH&E Research
- Networking Opportunities
- *Professional Safety* Journal
- Publication Opportunities
- Volunteer Opportunities



Search our
knowledge base



Follow us on
Twitter

When you see this symbol,
click it to learn more



The Communicator • Training & Communications Practice Specialty

Officers

Administrator

Michael T. Coleman, CSHM
michael.coleman@tyson.com

Assistant Administrator
OPEN

Content Coordinator
Howard W. Spencer, CSP,
CHCM
hspencer@jamontgomery
.com

The Communicator is a publication of ASSE's Training & Communications Practice Specialty, 520 N. Northwest Highway, Park Ridge, IL 60068, and is distributed free of charge to members of the Training & Communications Practice Specialty. The opinions expressed in articles herein are those of the author(s) and are not necessarily those of ASSE. Technical accuracy is the responsibility of the author(s). Send address changes to the mailing address above; via fax to (847) 768-3434; or via e-mail to customerservice@asse.org.



ASSE Staff

Manager, Practice Specialties
Charlyn Haguewood
chaguewood@asse.org

Communications Team
Tina Angley
Cathy Baker
Brendan Hilliard
Rachel Metea
Sue Trebswether
COPSpublications@asse.org