

THE safety mosaic

connecting people with health and safety news

When Dr. Louis Francescutti talks about health and safety, his passion for the subject is evident. For twelve years, he's been promoting the idea that society needs to be more responsible for research and the incidences of injury in our country. As politicians speak about a more preventative, wellness-based health-care system, Dr. Francescutti feels we are not moving in that direction. In fact, he says, we may actually be losing ground.

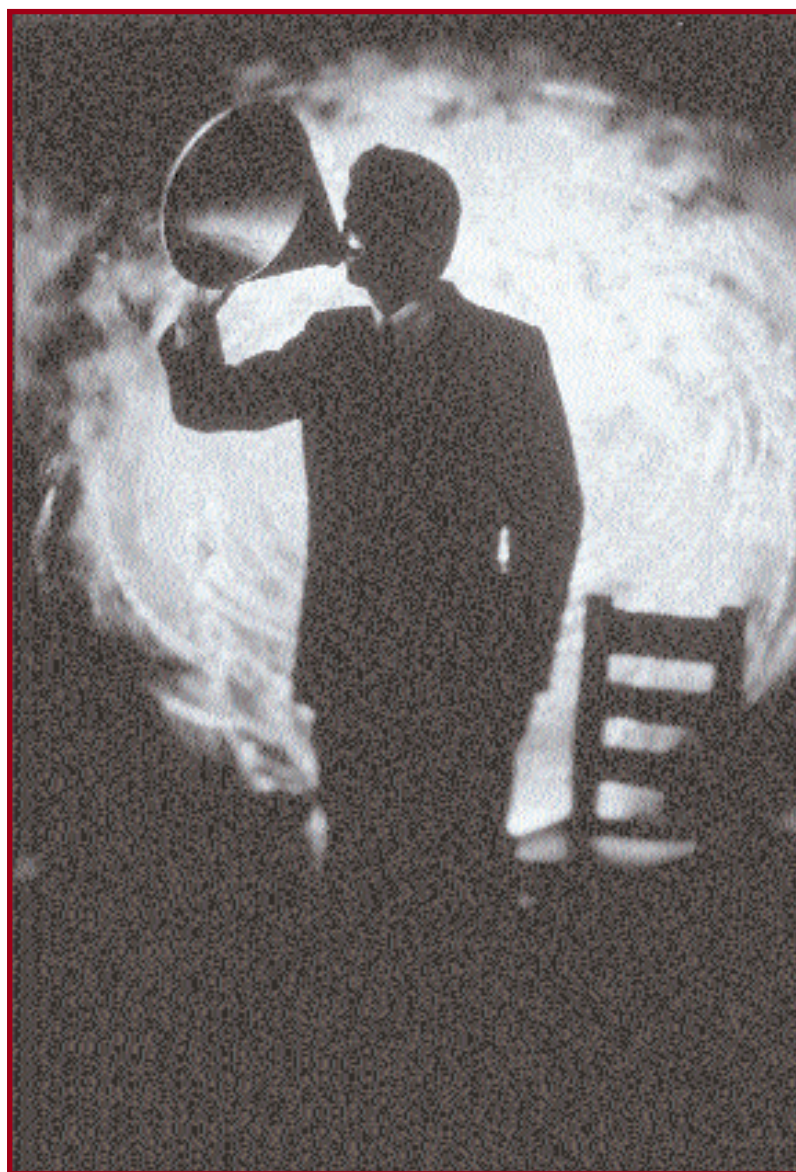
"The root of the problem lies in our current addiction to the treatment perspective on injury," says Francescutti. "It's where we put our emphasis, and it's where we put the money." Francescutti should know. As an emergency physician at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton, Alberta, he sees the outcome to injury treatment on a daily basis. "We don't have a health-care system in this country. We have a sick-care system," says Francescutti. "We respond to injuries by hiring more paramedics and trauma specialists. We build trauma centers and rehabilitation clinics. But we never get down to finding a real solution to the problem. Instead, we react to what's in front of us."

When Francescutti talks about injuries, he returns time and time again to a single point – there is no such thing as an 'accident.' "These terms are misnomers because they imply events about which nothing can be done," he says. "But injuries are predictable and preventable events. And the only treatment for injury is prevention."

The statistics are alarming. Injuries are the leading cause of death for Canadians under the age of 44. Annually, approximately 13,000 Canadians are expected to die needlessly as a result of injuries, and a quarter of a million individuals will be hospitalized, accounting for over two

For twelve years now, Dr. Louis Francescutti has been telling people to step up to the plate and fight for health and safety. At the recent OSSA Power of One Conference, he said it again.

Is Anyone Listening?



million hospital days. It has been estimated that injuries cost Canadians \$ 14.3 billion a year.

In Francescutti's mind, the statistics should be enough to enrage us as a society, and lead us to demand that something be done. Yet, in spite of repeated calls for action, over the past 10 years in Canada, very little has happened in relation to the magnitude of the injury problem. "Every other disease known to man has an organization that raises concern about that disease," says Francescutti. "When was the last time someone knocked on your door for a donation so that more research could be done for injury control?"

There may be many reasons for our apathy. Francescutti theorizes that Canada's decision-makers are not threatened by injuries as much as they are by heart disease and cancer. And he believes that we, as a society, have become so habituated by media reports of how common place these events are, we've become desensitized to their impact.

Within the workplace, a lack of leadership in the workplace has stifled the progression of injury prevention, notes Francescutti. "If you don't get the buy-in of the CEO and President, all the safety awareness in the world is going to have very little – if any – impact."

Francescutti does not envy the task employers have in front of them. "As a society, we don't emphasize injuries. The only place people hear about it is at work where, all of a sudden, they have to follow rules. We've created a serious disconnect between work and home that shouldn't exist."

The role of individuals in the injury prevention process needs to be magnified as well, says Francescutti, noting that many of us feel isolated and unsure of what can be done.

"Wouldn't it be great if we knew

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THE safety mosaic

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Is Anyone Listening? (Cont'd from page 1)

enough to be able to grill a prospective employer about his safety record with the same energy we put into negotiating salaries and benefits? If we stood up and demanded safety within an organization, instead of counting on our employers to keep us safe, it could make a real impact.”

According to Francescutti, the solution to injuries in Canada will come from the use of a combination of different approaches. “The most successful strategy is through engineering

“Injury is a disease. The only difference is that injuries usually do not have an incubation stage. An individual that is perfectly healthy one minute can be dead or seriously disabled a millisecond later.”

changes such as the design of safer products and workplace environments. This approach does not require the individual to make a conscious safety choice.”

An enforcement approach through legislation and significant fines is another effective means. “Employers who provide economic incentives for injury-free workplaces have found a novel way of taking steps towards injury reduction,” notes Francescutti.

Finally, education campaigns aimed at injury prevention can help to reduce the incidence of injury. However, education cannot work in isolation, warns Francescutti. “The most successful

strategies involve a combination of engineering, enforcement, economic incentives and education.”

Francescutti also supports the adoption of recent recommendations by the federal Advisory Committee on Population

“The annual health care burden of injury on our society exceeds that of cancer. Yet the resources allocated to injury control research – both financial and in terms of public attention – pale in comparison to cancer research.”

Health (ACPH) Public Health Working Group. The group developed a position paper entitled “National Injury Prevention and Control Strategy”. Its recommendations include recognizing injury as an important public health problem that requires a coordinated, multi-sectoral, multi-jurisdictional response. It calls for support for the development of a national strategy for injury prevention and control. And it highlights the need for the coordination of the development of a national framework for injury prevention and control by engaging all sectors and jurisdictions.

For Dr. Francescutti, the fight for injury prevention has been long and embattled. “It’s easy to look at the numbers and say that we’re not getting anywhere,” he says. “But I believe our voices are getting louder, and that the potential is there to make a difference. I look at it as running a marathon. I’m trying not to do it at a sprinter’s pace. I’m just trying to get to the finish line.”

Dr. Louis Francescutti is an assistant professor, Department of Public Health Sciences and Division of Emergency Medicine, University of Alberta, and an attending emergency physician, Royal Alexandra Hospital, Edmonton, Alberta.



The Power of One Life

On November 19, 1994, 19-year-old Sean Kells was killed as the result of a workplace explosion. At the Power of One OSSA Conference, his father, Paul Kells, provided a follow-up to the recommendations made at the Coroner’s Inquest. Mr. Kells noted that, while a lot of good work had been accomplished since his son’s death, there still existed much untapped potential and ample room for improvement. What follows is a brief excerpt from the presentation that describes what has yet to be accomplished.

“Since the inquest, thousands of people have taken on safety at work and in the community as a public duty with energy, grace and enthusiasm. They have been added to the legions of people who came before them. You too have done this. So today, and today only, let’s everyone rest for a minute. Now is the time to stand back. To celebrate. Because tomorrow, work begins anew. But on what? What can we hope for?”

Let’s see the task force on inter-agency enforcement and information-sharing be given the support it needs to move faster, to reach new levels of integrated enforcement. Seize the moment.

Let’s see the WSIB, which has already taken the first step, double its budget for awareness. Let it stand up again for what it believes in. Let it put the nay-sayers who want us to keep quiet about death at work back where they belong, in the murky shadows.

Let the government remove Justices of the Peace from presiding over occupational health and safety proceedings. It is a travesty to go to court, watch a JP come from presiding over a wedding ceremony for the revenue, hear a traffic ticket case and then sit in judgment on the outcome of a case against the killer of your child. It is time to end this farce. It is a travesty. Put serious cases where they belong.

And let the justice system apply the same penalties for children’s lives recklessly lost at work as it does for recklessly negligent drivers who take children’s lives on the street. The value of a human life at work is worth no less than when that person walks home.

And for us personally, what is the future?

It lies in the power of one person. In every community who talks to another person who talks to another person and on and on. The Power of One.

Let us assume responsibility for those around us by assuming responsibility for how they see the world. Let us take that one step, every day. The one step that causes the chain reaction. The one moment that changes the world.

That is the Power of One. It is in all of us. And everyone in this room, at one time or another in their lives, has been called out. You had no choice. You had to engage. You had to be there when it mattered.

Your mother, your father, your boy, your girl, your friends, your brothers and sisters. Their lives matter.

And that is what drives the Power of One in each and every one of us.”

WE ASKED

Laurentian University’s Centre for Research in Human Development (CRHD) is an interdisciplinary research center that supports a range of basic and applied research activities including major initiatives geared towards youth including the transition from school to work, body changes during growth, development of emotions, and youth and the environment.

Youth Issues in the Work Environment

With youth research initiatives garnering increased attention and resources across the prevention system, we asked CRHD’s Director, Dr. John Lewko and Research Associate, Kate Tilleczek, to talk to us about what they’ve learned about youth and their transition to the work environment.

What are the differences between young and adult workers when it comes to safety?

John Lewko – Any new worker brings a set of experience and learning to the workplace. The fundamental difference between a young worker and an older worker is that the young worker has not had the opportunity to shape that skill-based level of thinking. There are organizational dimensions that place young workers at a disadvantage. **Kate Tilleczek** – All research agrees that young workers take more risks than adults, and they experiment to gain a sense of self. This isn’t necessarily problematic. In fact, it’s necessary to grow. If a young worker is going to take risks, it is the employer’s job to channel it properly. Use that knowledge to shape the young worker’s safety sense and help them build a repertoire of experience that they can draw upon in a work situation to make the healthiest and safest decisions.

Do employers view young workers as different from adult workers?

JL – Definitely. Young workers have historically been seen as ‘migrant’ workers, meaning that they don’t stay in any job for long. Because of that, employers may not have worked hard at relationship building, and their expectations of the young worker may not be as intense as they would be for an adult worker.

KT – If you look at the literature and injury prevention in the occupational setting, much of it is oriented towards an adult mindset. We haven’t given much recognition to the growing number of young workers in this country.

Why is research in this area important?

JL – There are gaps in the information gathered to date and much of it has not been validated. We need to recognize that today’s adolescents are tomorrow’s adult workers and managers. The attitudes they learn now are transportable. That means the habits they develop in their early years will be carried with them throughout their work lives.

What stumbling blocks do young workers face when they enter the workplace?

KT – We know that young workers are three times more likely to become injured than adults. Yet young worker training is very limited. Generally, the orientation is brief, and the young worker is put into tasks quickly without a lot of follow-up such as job-specific training and supervision.

JL – What employers need to understand is that there are economic implications to injuries suffered by young workers that can exceed those of older workers. For example, if the incident impacts the young worker’s future career, the costs can be higher because they are over a longer term.

How should an employer view a young worker?

KT – Employers should perceive young workers as ‘high potential contributors’. Research shows that when it comes to the basic ability to make decisions, there are more similarities than differences between adolescences and adults. You have these minds that observe and solve problems and learn very quickly. However, the experience – the health and safety ‘sense’ – may not be there.

JL – Young workers have the capacity but it takes the organizational structure to bring it out and support it. If a workplace is organized in a way that limits or suppresses that ability, it is communicating to the young worker that management intends to keep the new worker at a simplistic level of functioning rather than helping him or her

grow. Young workers are capable of rising to the occasion, and quick to understand where they fit it, provided the opportunities are made available.

What role does a supervisor or manager play in developing a safety ‘sense’ in a young worker?

JL – Young workers should not be left on their own to work out their own health and safety problems without prior training and supervisory guidance. Supervision is necessary to ensure that young workers are developing the basic skills needed to perform tasks, and to work safely and efficiently.

KT – There is research that shows that when young workers are injured, there is no supervision around. Young workers need developmentally appropriate training. That takes some effort, because if your training is at a level that is beyond or below their level of knowledge, it just won’t work.

JL – Employers need to be able to recognize ‘gaps’ in skills and then figure out ways to help the young worker acquire that knowledge so that a skill-based level of thinking is there for them automatically – including an understanding of risk taking and how to apply safe and healthy work practices.

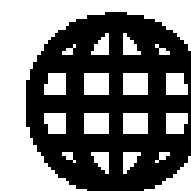
KT – That training also entails on-going assessment. You want to make sure they’ve heard you correctly, have understood and are doing the job safely.

What would you say to employers hiring young workers this summer?

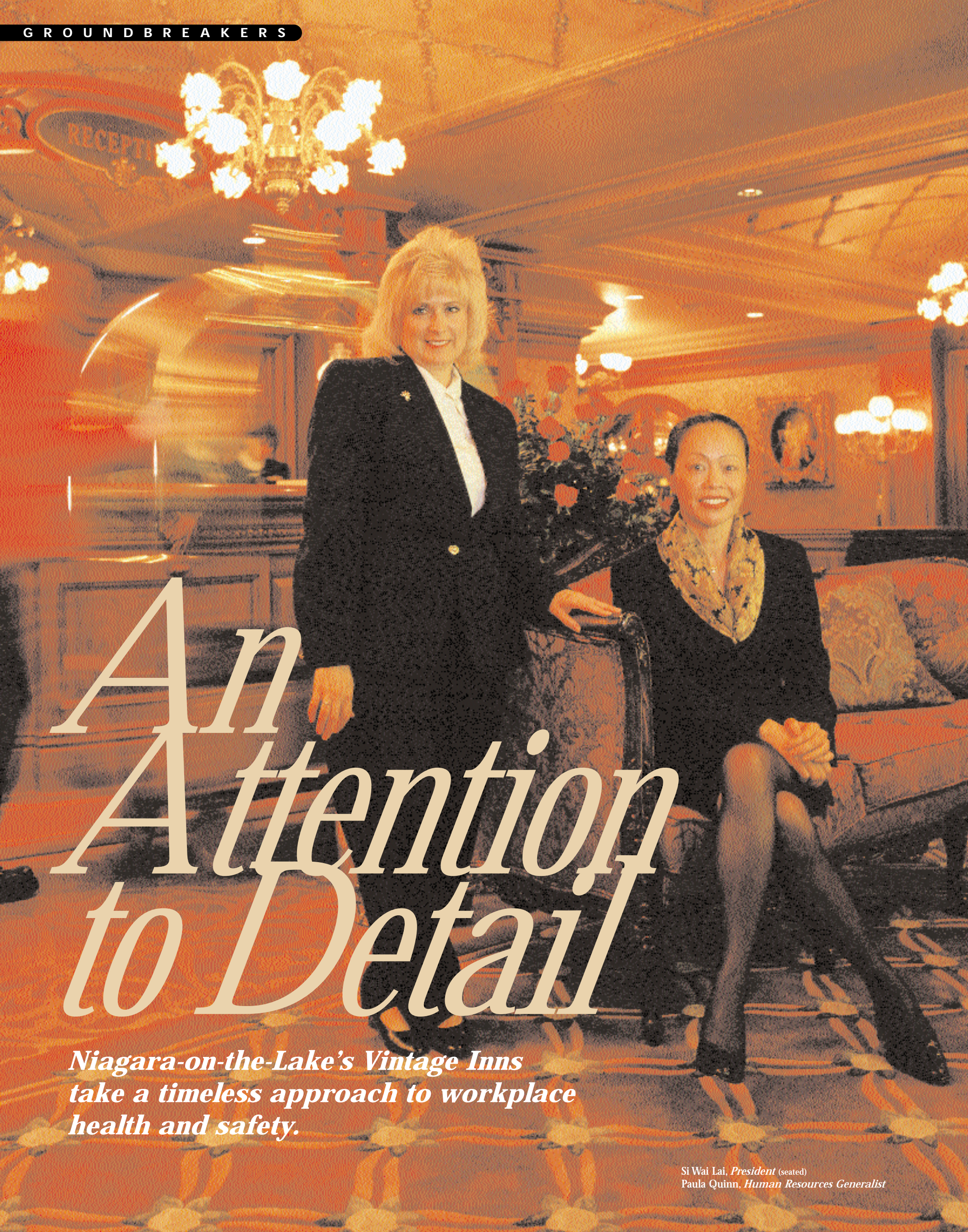
JL – Young workers have the ability to add tremendous value to your operation. An employer has to be prepared to move their young workers’ understanding beyond what they have coming in, and be willing to take the time to increase their performance level at the front end, rather than waiting for an accident to happen.

KT – Young workers need positive experiences and work environments that recognize their strengths, capabilities and mindset. A good employer can provide that.

Thank you to our sponsor of the OSSA Power of One Conference.



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An Attention to Detail

Niagara-on-the-Lake's Vintage Inns take a timeless approach to workplace health and safety.

Si Wai Lai, *President* (seated)
Paula Quinn, *Human Resources Generalist*



One of the most recognizable hoteliers in the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is Vintage Inns. The brainchild of entrepreneur, Si Wai Lai, in less than a decade, the Vintage Inns family has grown to include such well-known landmarks as the Pillar and Post Inn, Queen's Landing Inn and Conference Resort, Prince of Wales Hotel and most recently, the Oban Inn. In this bustling tourist destination, the Inns' Shaw Café and Wine Bar on the main street adds another service industry dimension to the Vintage Inns' offerings.

BUILDING SAFETY FROM THE GROUND UP

The growth of Vintage Inns has led to challenges for the organization. One of the first and foremost has been ensuring the continued health and safety of both guests and workers in the face of on-going expansion.

At Vintage Inns, this challenge has been met with enthusiasm and success. According to Paula Quinn, Vintage Inns' Human Resources Generalist, three years ago, the group – known for the high quality of its hotel properties – decided to create an equally high-quality health and safety program. This was an ambitious plan, notes Quinn. At the time, the company did not even have a human resources department.

"For Vintage Inns, a clearly-defined and accountable health and safety program is viewed as a smart business practice," explains Quinn. "It deserves as much attention as any other fundamental aspect of our daily operations."

By hiring Quinn, Si Wai Lai sent a strong signal to all the employees that she, and her top management, were making a commitment to health and safety.

"There's no way that health and safety can be viewed as a part-time, on and off again function," says Quinn. "It needs to be in the forefront of everyday activities. It needs to be applied with consistency across all our properties so that everyone clearly understands what management expects and

their role in ensuring that health and safety expectations are met."

Under the strong leadership of Esther Lee, Executive Director, Administration and Human Resources, Quinn began the task of weaving the fabric of a health and safety program that eventually would become one of the key spokes of a well-defined human resources department.

But it didn't start out that way. A preliminary look at the Inns' past health and safety record showed stunning losses of revenue. "One of our properties' NEER surcharges was \$10,000 for two years," remembers Quinn. "No one was allocated to claims management. Our short-term disability claims were extremely high and there was incredible potential for abuse of the system. We were literally waiting for an accident to happen."

With the assistance of the March of Dimes, Vintage Inns developed a comprehensive "Early and Safe Return to Work" program and targeted five to six areas with the most accidents. They also did physical demands analysis for specific positions such as room attendants, porters, stewards and bakers, as well as a job site analysis of two positions.

The organization was quick to recognize the tangible financial benefits that a sound health and safety program could bring. Quinn points out that Vintage Inns' initial \$9,000 investment in setting up its "Early and Safe Return to Work" program reaped a return of \$11,000 in the first year alone.

Another pressing issue facing Vintage Inns was the lack of consistency throughout the Inns' hotels. "We had Joint Health and Safety Committees that were made up of management and staff from each property but they were not sure what their exact role was," remembers Quinn. "This did not help inspire their attendance or involvement. Someone was required to take charge of monitoring this but since we were a multi-property company, it was impossible. There

wasn't any consistency."

With the assistance of an OSSA consultant, Vintage Inns set out to revamp its Committees' roles and functions. "Once our Committees had a clearer vision of their goals, they were able to start working towards a safer workplace for everyone. The ideas just started flowing," says Quinn. As well, a set of health and safety manuals was developed. These identical materials are used at each Vintage Inns property to ensure the same high standards are applied across the entire operation.

This continuity was especially important last year when Vintage Inns needed to ready the Prince of Wales property for the company's first ever WSIB Workwell Audit. Equally educated employees and management at all the group's properties were able to pitch in with assistance. The happy result was that the Prince of Wales passed the audit on the first try.

ESTABLISHING A TEAM APPROACH TO SAFETY

Commitment from higher management is essential to any health and safety program, as is the creation of a Joint Health and Safety Committee and certification of Committee members, notes Quinn. But employees play an equally important part in making a safe workplace a reality.

The Vintage Inns' employee count fluctuates between 800 and 1,200 depending on the season. These employees are referred to as 'team players', and they have provided Vintage Inns with a valuable key to ensuring a top-notch health and safety program.

For a program to truly fulfill its potential, one core requisite is to instill a source of pride in all workers, advises Quinn, "If our team players feel pride in our health and safety record – and feel safe on the job – then they will continue to be involved in creating a safe environment. A number of our team players have asked us to help them achieve certification for

themselves, even when it is not a requisite of their job."

An integral component of Vintage Inns' philosophy is encouraging team members to assess health and safety concerns and then to make recommendations. After all, notes Lee, team players are on the front lines. "If they understand their rights and responsibilities, they will act on them," she says. "It is up to management to start them off on the right foot by emphasizing the importance of health and safety right from their two-day orientation training. Then they must ensure team members understand management's total commitment to health and safety initiatives."

TAKING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Both Quinn and Lee stress that health and safety should not be restricted to "on the job" functions. Vintage Inns' management believes strongly that health and safety education for its team "off the job", and for the community-at-large also fulfills Si Wai Lai's philosophy that corporate business has a "social responsibility to the community."

As a result, this spring, Vintage Inns is launching a one-day Safety Awareness Day that will include local school children and Niagara-on-the-Lake residents. The day will feature bicycle safety and barbecue safety tips, along with general health and safety outdoor/water safety ideas that are suitable for the summer months.

Today, Vintage Inns' desire to become a groundbreaker in health and safety has become a reality. In fact, the company now acts as a "mentor" within the WSIB program, helping other companies to achieve viable health and safety programs.

"The positive things just keep building and building," says Quinn. "We are very confident about the future. Our safety and health standards are implemented in our core values. It's a part of our vision now."

Until recently, employee well-being has been a wallflower to performance improvement because managers have chosen not to gauge its impact. The reality is that there is a profound relationship between service and safety – and it can be measured.

Vehicle sales and service organizations understand that customer service represents the difference between profitability and empty service bays. But what is less recognized is the impact that healthy employees can have on the bottom line. In her role as a business consultant, Danielle Pratt of Healthy Business Inc. in Calgary, Alberta, encourages employers to foster the connection between profitability and healthier organizations.

According to Pratt, the parallels between quality and employee well-

being are profound. "An unsafe environment will not allow you to provide high levels of service to your customers," explains Pratt. "And we know that poor service usually results in

ability of some workplaces to 'fit' workplace safety into their overall culture. "The vast majority of those workplaces feel powerless to prevent stress, illness, and injury so they compartmentalize it," she says. "What they should be doing is looking at it as part of the overall culture of their organization, and they'll see that it can play a huge part in elevating service from average to superior."

The Hamilton District Autobody Repair Association is a trade association that delivers profitability seminars

to shops around the province. "The real successes we've encountered are those owners who incorporate safety into a broader vision of the organization," says John Norris, the Association's Executive Director. "The employer understands how it affects their profitability and the quality of service they can provide. Employees understand how it fits into every part of their business. That type of commitment is invaluable."

A dismal 9.2% rating on a WSIB audit last year provided the incentive Gus Brown Pontiac Buick needed to take a hard look at its health and safety commitment. A mere three months later, hard work on the part of everyone in the organization paid off with a superb score of 80.4% on a second audit. Perhaps a bigger benefit to the company, however, was an improved employee attitude. "As part of the audit, we had to rework all our job descriptions to include health and safety," recalls General Manager, Don

Switzer. "It gave us the opportunity to really think about how health and safety fit into everyone's day-to-day jobs. Today, employees are aware that safety is just as important as every other part of our organization."

Producing happy and safe employees means providing such technical skills as WHMIS training, certainly. But, according to Norris, it also involves creating something just as important – a sense of self-worth amongst employees.

"Interestingly, when we've asked employees what is important about their jobs, they don't always put money at the top of their list," he notes. "They emphasize the importance of being valued. An employee is more likely to stay with an employer if they feel they have some worth. Taking

something you had to do to prevent an inspector from knocking on your door. Today, we have a booming economy and a shortage of skilled trades. More and more organizations are recognizing the significant value of having a healthier workforce. And they're taking responsibility for ensuring it."

compensated based on speed alone, then that's what they're going to get. But employees are going to hurt themselves achieving that. Quality is going to suffer. And customers are going to be unhappy."

Norris feels that attitude is changing. "Not long ago, safety used to be

"We used to look at health and safety as a pain. Today, it's part of our business and is given the same priority as the other things we do."

– DON SWITZER,
GENERAL MANAGER,
GUS BROWN PONTIAC-BUICK

For Gus Brown Pontiac Buick, a renewed focus on safety has created a safer workplace that's noticed by customers and suppliers alike. "If our processes have employees thinking about working safer, that's got to have an impact on our customers. And if our commitment to safety saves one life, then all our efforts over the past six months have been worth it. We used to look at health and safety as a pain. Today, it's part of our business and is given the same priority as the other things we do."

Organizational strategy is about cause and affect, notes Pratt. "If there's any area we know management can have a predictive impact on, it's in the area of health and safety. It's a win-win situation."

"Employee well-being is good business," says Norris. "You can't help but think that customers notice and appreciate congenial, non-stressed staff. It has to have a positive impact on your business."

Driving Home the Service-Safety Message

being are profound. "An unsafe environment will not allow you to provide high levels of service to your customers," explains Pratt. "And we know that poor service usually results in

"The real successes are those owners who incorporate safety into a broader vision of the organization"

– JOHN NORRIS,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
HAMILTON DISTRICT AUTOBODY REPAIR ASSOCIATION

customers looking elsewhere – and there are lots of places they can go in today's economy."

Pratt believes that the keys to high performance are also the drivers of superior health and safety results. That philosophy hasn't always been an easy sell to the organizations she talks to. Historically, organizations have approached health and safety as an isolated function, separate from all other areas of the operation. In Pratt's view, this segmentation has narrowed

More Service – More Access.

In the service business, standing still means falling behind. As your health and safety organization, we believe that holds true for us as well. The products and services we develop must offer you the best, the fastest and the most accessible solutions to your health and safety needs, or we fall behind. Over the last few months, we've been putting the finishing touches on two exciting new initiatives designed to keep you at the health and safety forefront.



The expansion of our corporate website, www.ossa.com, offers clients a brand new look and feel, and more customized, sector-specific information than ever before. Elizabeth Mills, OSSA's General Manager and C.E.O., notes that the expansion of the existing website is all about streamlining OSSA's current business process to be more responsive to sector-specific needs. "We want to strengthen the value we provide to

our clients," says Mills. "Our new website will give us the opportunity to expand our potential by uniting two of our most valuable assets – people and information." Look for the launch of the enhanced OSSA website in late summer.



If you've got questions, we've got more answers than ever before. Our enhanced client service line, developing in partnership with the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) will elevate the service we offer clients to new heights. With one call, OSSA members will be able to tap into the CCOHS and OSSA's expertise in health and safety information, and access valuable health and safety training and consulting products, services and contacts. Look for the enhanced Client Services Line later this summer.

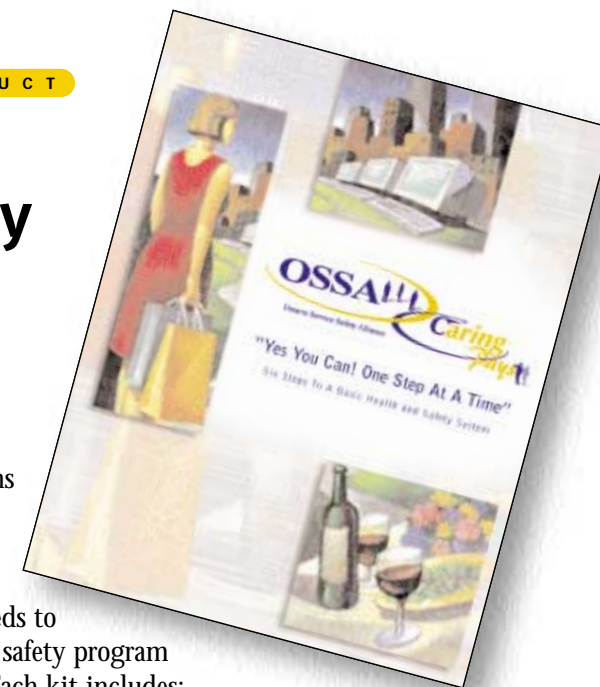
Introducing the

National Awards of Excellence in Disability Management

The National Institute of Disability Management and Research (NIDMAR) has established a new National Awards program recognizing outstanding achievements of organizations and individuals who have championed disability management. To receive a nomination form or for more information, visit www.nidmar.ca or call 250 724-4344/8745 or 613 260-2951. Deadline for nominations is May 31, 2000.

NEW PRODUCT

Health & Safety Starter Kit



The Occupational Health and Safety Starter Kit contains all the essential information a small to mid sized company needs to get its health and safety program up and running. Each kit includes:

- The "Yes You Can! One Step at a Time: Six Steps to a Basic Health and Safety System" Guide – designed to get your business on the road to a healthier and safer workplace. This Guide clearly and concisely identifies the keys to a successful program, and outlines the steps involved in making it a reality.
- "The Business Case for Workplace Health and Safety" video
- A Portable Fire Extinguisher brochure
- A Fire Escape Planning brochure
- A Guide for Developing a Basic Occupational Health and Safety Program
- Customized OH&S Act Pocket Extract
- A Guide to the Occupational Health and Safety Act
- A Guide for JHSCs and Representatives in the Workplace
- WHMIS: Guide to Legislation
- First Aid Requirements (Regulation 1101) Booklet
- A Guide to Smoking in the Workplace
- "In Case of Injury/Illness" Poster
- OSSA Products and Services Catalogue

Upcoming Trade Show Events

The following is a listing of upcoming trade shows and conferences of interest to Ontario's service sector.

VENUE	DATE	LOCATION
New Horizons in Health and Safety Conference Industrial Accident Prevention Association	June 8	St. Clair College, Thomas Campus Chatham, Ontario
Toronto Business Forum International Council of Shopping Centers	June 14	Toronto Marriott Toronto, Ontario
CBA 2000 Trade Show Canadian Booksellers Association	June 17 – 19	Metro Toronto Convention Centre Toronto, Ontario
2000 Excellence in Retailing Awards Dinner Retail Council of Canada	June 19	Metro Toronto Convention Centre Toronto, Ontario
36th Annual Retail Council of Canada Conference Retail Council of Canada	June 19 – 20	Metro Toronto Convention Centre Toronto, Ontario
Western Canada Exchange International Council of Shopping Centres	July 9 – 11	Calgary, Alberta
Atlantic Provinces Idea Exchange International Council of Shopping Centres	August 23 – 25	The Westin Halifax, Nova Scotia

JUGGLING THE ACT

Balancing Work and Home

By Victoria Curran

There's no getting around the fact that Canadians work a lot of hours. According to Statistics Canada, 26 percent of employees work over 40 hours each week, and 15 percent work over 50 hours. The most stressful households are probably the 60 percent of two-parent families where both parents work – especially at dinner hour when one or both trundle home with the kids from daycare. That doesn't leave much elbowroom for life outside the office, especially since supposedly time-saving technology like laptop computers and the Internet actually encourage employees to work longer – at home.

An Angus Reid poll taken in February concluded that almost half of Canadians feel the stress of heavy workloads, financial obligations and balancing work and family. Most often that stress leads to anxiety, irritability and insomnia, but it's also causing a substantial number of employees to get sick more often and book more time off work to cope. When they are at work, employees who have worries about work-life balance often don't perform to capacity.

Ironically, many corporations give staff the best individual support after they let them go, providing access to job-loss programs and teaching them how to plan financially and market themselves for better positions. Why not make that investment while employees are still employed? That way they will feel more stable

GIVING EMPLOYEES A BREAK

- Instead of making individual arrangements with employees regarding time to accommodate family needs, put it into a blanket company policy.
- Encourage employees to share responsibility for avoiding burnout by setting boundaries and priorities and being flexible to the company's needs.
- Offer flexible work arrangements (compressed schedules, flex-time, telecommuting, part-time, job sharing, or sabbaticals).
- Provide employees with the tools to manage their time well and discourage managers from giving employees more tasks than they have time to accomplish.
- Let employees know that they can take work home if they want to – but shouldn't feel guilty if they choose not to.
- Respect the fact that there is life beyond work.

in their positions, envision a future within the company, and rest easier about how they'll survive in retirement.

That task starts with a look at the workplace environment – and your role in it. Today's boss is not a babysitter, time clock guardian or a parental figure. Instead, the managerial role is becoming one of facilitating and mentoring employees to achieve top performance. Together, employees and managers can discover how individual employees' work best fits within the larger goals of the company.

If that means stretching the definition of when a workday begins and ends, so be it. Combining vacation, sick leave and personal leave times, or providing flex hours are two ways employers can let staff know that they manage for results, and not just the time spent at the office. Employees whose personal needs are met are likely to be less distracted and resentful.

Where 10-hour days are standard, instead of trying to change the hours, many companies are changing the corporate attitude toward them by not taking staff for granted. Instead, they compress the work week, reward their staff's efforts with every second Friday off, or facilitate tele-commuting. And if the hours are consistently long, they take time to organize special gatherings that include employees' families, making everyone in the company aware that work does not define the person.



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