The Hidden Hazard Of Complacency

“When a great team loses through complacency, it will constantly search for new and more intricate explanations to explain away defeat.”

Pat Riley

In 2010, there were 4,547 fatal and 2.9 million non-fatal work injuries in the US. According to the National Safety Council, the single most common cause of workplace fatalities is **Complacency**.

**What Is Complacency?**

Complacency is defined as “self-satisfaction, especially when accompanied by unawareness of actual dangers or deficiencies.”

In short, we stop paying attention. And when it comes to Safety, we become at risk for injury, illness and even death.

There are four major causes of Complacency:

1. **Systematic Desensitization:** When we hear a message repeatedly or have gradual exposure to a dangerous activity, over time we become immune to the message or danger.

2. **Normalization of Deviance:** A long-term phenomenon in which individuals or teams repeatedly “get away” with a deviation from established standards until it is no longer seen as a deviation; it becomes the implied standard. You do something without getting hurt, so you keep doing it. And the more you don’t get hurt, the more you believe that you can’t get hurt.
3. **Inattentional Blindness:** In short, we see what we look for. When we are focused on one thing—like getting a job done quickly—we pay little attention to hazards that may be around us. Expecting what is “supposed” to happen can result in missing the unexpected or out of the ordinary.

4. **Optimism Bias:** Scientists call this a “Mild Positive Illusion.” The rest of us call it “Rose-colored Glasses.” We overestimate the likelihood of positive events and underestimate the likelihood of negative events. We don’t think an accident can happen to us, but we’re sure we’re going to win the lottery.

In addition to these causes, Complacency can also arise from fatigue, stress and long hours.

**Warning Signs**

There are ways to spot Complacency in your workplace:

- **Accepting Lower Standards of Performance:** For example, not completing or following an inspection sheet or checklist.

- **Erosion of Desire to Remain Proficient:** Not making the effort to keep learning leads to falling behind.

- **Boredom and Inattention:** It’s a chore to come to work day after day, people don’t feel challenged.

- **Satisfaction with the Status Quo:** People resist change, no continuous improvement)

- **Neglecting Personal Safety Items:** At first, this might seem more like stupidity, but neglecting even the smallest item of personal safety may be a strong symptom of complacency.
Avoiding Complacency

Steering clear of Complacency requires 2 kinds of Awareness:

1. **Situational Awareness:** See the big picture, not just the details. Be aware of everything around you and how they might interact to create a dangerous situation.

2. **Self-Awareness:** Think about what you’re thinking about. Pay attention to your Mindset and where your focus is.

If you’re a Leader, keep Safety:

- **Fresh:** Change the method, but never the message.
- **Personal:** Know each individual, talk and listen, tell your stories
- **Important:** Demand Safety, don’t tolerate any deviation from safe practices

Thomas Edison once said, “We shall have no better conditions in the future if we are satisfied with all those which we have at present.” Don’t be satisfied, don’t be content and don’t be complacent...especially about Complacency!

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**For more information on Complacency:**

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