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Workplace Complacency

Introduction

When complacency is identified, it is often too late. A life or livelihood could be lost in the blink of an eye due to assumptions, distractions, and overconfidence. Generally, it takes all three of these variables to properly initiate the crisis.

From the experienced worker to the new hire, complacency can take many forms. For example, the most experienced worker may become overconfident in their abilities and become complacent. On the other hand, a new employee driving a forklift for the first time may become over-stressed and lose focus on what they are doing. Complacency allows distractions to divert their attention away from their task and can hurt a worker's confidence.

It can be difficult to find statistics specifically naming complacency as a leading cause of incidents/injuries, but unintentional injuries are a good starting point, as we can imagine complacent behavior may be a contributing factor. According to one source, unintentional injuries accounted for 86% of injury costs (\$25.3 billion)' (source: <https://parachute.ca/en/professional-resource/cost-of-injury-in-canada/>).

Recognizing Complacency

The first step in eliminating workplace complacency is understanding what it is. The concept of complacency in a work setting essentially means that a worker has grown comfortable with their role, tasks, risks, and hazards, and therefore may make lapses in judgment. This lapse is often because they feel comfortable enough to forgo a piece of safety, a second equipment check, or maybe they zone out while doing a hazardous task because they have done it many times in the past without incident.

Eliminating complacency is almost impossible due to its intimate relationship with experience, however, ignoring it can certainly cost you. The first step is to recognize unique complacency issues in your environment and then encourage conversations on the issue.

There could be many adept people within your company who respect and avoid complacency. Conversations on the topic could allow them to speak about past experiences with machinery, equipment, turbines, etc. Their first-hand experience can be used to help others deal with complacency.

If you don't associate complacency with real problems around your work, workers may find the issue insulting and patronizing. Every employee needs to recognize the triggers leading to complacent behaviour and this can be accomplished through simply sharing and relating stories of past work experiences. There's no shame in complacency, but we should not disregard our vulnerabilities.



Universal Contributors to Complacency

Before you can recognize workplace complacency, you must first take note of common contributors. In a previous article, we discussed in more detail the types of complacency and what this looks like. You can view that article here - <https://www.trainanddevelop.ca/blog/defeat-employee-complacency/> For the case of this paper, we've summarized them below.

Shortcuts:

skipping steps, over/under confidence, or lacking a sense of responsibility

Poor time management:

Personal Contributors to Complacency

Along with work distractions and environmental issues, personal attitudes also contribute to complacency. This seems obvious, but let's go over ways to recognize the hints of complacent behaviour and how to keep your staff happy and motivated.

Active disengagement:

Disengagement means we are distracted by something other than what we are doing – whether that be our own happiness/dissatisfaction, psychological stress, or distractions.

Active disengagement refers to an individual who is unhappy in their role and shows obvious signs. They lash out, make comments, and/or disrupt others. These employees are often extremely complacent, focusing on everything but their duties.

Value:

When we lose sight of the value, we lose motivation. This can lead to loss of interest or pride in performing quality work, a deterioration of team mentality, and disinterest in career advancement opportunities. When we feel valued, or make others feel valued, it can mitigate complacent behavior.

If an employee feels they have hit a wall in their career growth, no matter the reason, their work often plateaus, and they may take their work less seriously. This lack of motivation can cause large mistakes and accidents.

Acting without thinking:

When we are complacent, distracted, overwhelmed, or new to a task, our minds tend to move more quickly than our bodies. It is critical to always think before acting to ensure our actions do not create a new hazard or increase the potential of pre-incident by-incident.

Statistics

Of these cases, **Canadian Workers Compensation** demonstrates that lost-time claims at workplaces during 2018 account for 264,438 of those cases – over 2,000 of which were workplace-related fatalities. (2,054 work-related deaths/claims)

(See 2018 Key statistical measures report image below by AWCBC at <https://awcbc.org/en/statistics/ksm-annual-report/>)

Canadian Workers' Compensation System - 2018 Year at a Glance

Claim Measures	CAN	NL	PE	NS	NB	QC	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC	NT/NU	YT
Lost time injury frequency (per 100 workers)	1.67	1.60	1.52	1.81	1.56	1.99	1.16	2.57	2.11	1.47	2.20	2.21	1.77
Lost Time Claims		3,505	1,133	6,119	5,036	78,504	64,855	13,177	8,846	20,048	53,856	933	426
Fatalities		36	1	34	22	226	334	24	48	162	131	6	3
Workforce Covered (%)		97.44	97.79	74.14	91.39	92.60	77.21	79.23	73.72	82.01	98.21	96.85	99.13
% of Wage Loss Claims off compensation at 90 days		68.07	67.78	68.85	69.26	71.14	82.87	85.40	72.08	74.90	75.00	78.20	81.46
Duration (Average - Days)		135.07	67.86	126.91	54.89	U/A	N/A	33.54	59.25	78.11	75.90	63.60	28.67

Financial Measures	NL	PE	NS	NB	QC	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC	NT/NU	YT
Percentage Funded (%)	119.50	146.30	85.50	88.00	108.70	104.50	148.42	128.42	118.30	152.64	102.00	132.30
Market Rate of Return (%)	-0.42	-1.32	-1.00	-1.30	3.80	-0.70	1.50	-1.90	1.40	2.10	-0.20	-0.90
Current Year Benefit Costs Per \$100 of Assessable Payroll (\$)	1.04	1.03	1.79	1.63	1.36	0.75	0.69	0.80	0.96	1.17	1.11	1.09
Administration Costs Per \$100 of Assessable Payroll (\$)	0.41	0.29	0.41	0.33	0.23	0.33	0.36	0.26	0.19	0.29	0.86	0.69
Average Assessment Rate (\$)	1.90	1.60	2.65	1.70	1.79	2.35	0.95	1.19	1.02	1.55	2.05	1.93
Assessable Payroll (\$ Billions)	8.2	2.1	11.3	9.7	153.5	210.0	19.8	22.4	102.3	103.3	3.1	1.3

Statistics

Cases by Intent of Injury Outcome, All ages, Both sexes, Canada 2018

Cause	Deaths	Hospitalizations	ED Visits	Disability
Falls	5,249	133,017	1,469,723	38,848
Suicide/self-harm	3,809	16,419	65,063	3,836
Unintentional poisoning	3,477	10,772	79,231	2,591
Other unintentional	2,174	34,368	2,270,901	7,619
Transport Incidents	1,759	23,872	366,444	5,714
Violence	368	7,433	138,134	1,430
Drowning	280	217	1,700	18
Undetermined Intent	197	2,784	23,391	639
Fire/burns	162	2,193	51,904	386
Sports equipment*	0	454	89,374	320
Total	17,475	231,530	4,555,865	61,400

*Injuries from struck by/against sport equipment

Note: Cases cannot be totalled across outcomes as they are not exclusive.

Data sorted in descending order by number of deaths.

For all ages combined, falls were again the leading cause of injury deaths, followed by suicide/self-harm, unintentional poisoning, and transport incidents. Falls were also the leading cause of hospitalizations, followed by transport in

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Statistics

Let's do some focusing of our own!

How do these statistics stack up against lost-time claims reported in Canada? We used AWBC's National Work Injury and Fatality Statistics (Source) for the same year (2018) for good measure. In 2018, there were a total of 264,438 lost-time claims in Canada. Of those cases: **Falls at work accounted for nearly 20% of all claims!**

Falls to lower level	13,939
Falls on same level	34,661
Other fall types	1,762
Total LTC Claims in Canada for work-related falls - 2018	50,362

Transportation accidents at work accounted for 8,115 lost-time claims!

(Not including water, aircraft, or railway).

Highway accidents	5,458
Non-highway accidents	1,663
Pedestrian struck by mobile equipment	890
Other transportation/auto accidents	104
Total LTC Claims in Canada for work-related transport accidents - 2018	8,115

It can be easy to view this data with emotional detachment. But we need to remember that every value on this list accounts for a life lost, lives changed, and (hopefully) corrective actions implemented as the result of each occurrence. As safety professionals, we can relate the costs of accidents to the iceberg theory – knowing that there is much more to the cost of incidents than what is immediately seen on the surface. **For perspective, in 2018 for every 100,000 people in Canada, 47 people died from an injury.**

Since the greatest rates of injury result from falls and transportation/auto accidents, and we are at risk of experiencing these on a day-to-day basis, it's a good place to start practicing flexing our attention muscles against complacency. Strengthening our self-awareness will affect our focus during other potentially hazardous situations/tasks, improving our overall control against injury and loss prevention.



Battling Complacency: Falls

To protect against slips, trips, and falls, we must include an assessment of where these occurrences are most likely to appear. Once you have identified these areas in your workplace, take these steps to best prevent slips and falls at work:

Look where you are going

Ensure there is adequate lighting

If there is a handrail, use it!

If there is a wall, use it to stabilize yourself

Wear appropriate non-damaged footwear to match hazards of the environment



Battling Complacency: Car Accidents

Another time complacency can rear its head is when a driver pushes a vehicle 'past the point of no return' (when you no longer have enough time to make the turn, cross the lane of traffic, or successfully proceed through



Impacts of Complacency

on Society and the Individual

The costs of complacency are astonishing. Since we can attribute most injuries to complacency, it's prudent to investigate just how costly this really is. In a society where medical fees are paid by the people; everyone must constantly strive to mitigate those costs. Complacency is again, impossible to eliminate, **but awareness can reduce the costs facing Canadians.**

Costs to Canada: According to Parachute (a leading non-profit committed to injury reduction), Canadians pay a hefty price tag for injury.

- The direct cost of \$10.8 billion for injuries seen in emergency departments in 2018 included \$10.17 billion for medical costs and \$0.58 billion for rehabilitation costs.
- Unintentional injuries accounted for 86% of injury costs (\$25.3 billion).
- Falls had a higher total cost than any other cause in 2018, accounting for \$10.3 billion and 35% of the total cost of injury.
- Transport incidents had a total cost of \$3.6 billion direct and indirect costs.

Sociological Costs



for the Individual

Let's break that down for the individual



Fatigue can be seen as a form of complacency, in fact, any impairment with the assumption of success can be seen as a complacent decision. When driving impaired, you're betting other people's lives on the very assumption

Complacent Costs to a Business

We all have a moral responsibility to fight complacency, but what is the cost of complacency on a business?

Disengaged management can corrupt your whole culture and sap any passion it has. Disengaged management is essentially complacent in a company's demise. If the top-brass no longer builds towards the future, the company will be overtaken by an organization that does.

**Let's pivot back to how complacency can affect the entire business?
And let's demonstrate how these values may be expressed in terms of lost profitability as a case study:**

- Let's assume you run a company with a personnel roster of 150 people.
- Assuming only 25% of those total workers are focused and engaged, 113 (75%) of the total 150 employees are complacent (not actively engaged, or actively disengaged) in their work duties/tasks/jobs based on the data. This is an undeniable risk!

If the salary of those employees is comparable to the national complacency loss of \$18,574.00 per employee, per year.

That means overall employee complacency is costing your organization over \$2 million annually (\$18,574.00 per worker x 113 workers = \$2,098,862.00/year).

With complacent workers come high rates of employee turnover. Many employers think the solution for employee satisfaction is to throw money at the problem; this is due to 89% of employers thinking their people leave for a pay increase, however, data shows that employees who do leave for an increase in salary only account for 12% of the cases ([www.canadahrcentre.com / solutions/employee-engagement/](http://www.canadahrcentre.com/solutions/employee-engagement/)).

The reality is turnover can be attributed to many things. You need to take a

Reinvigorating Your Staff

There's no easy way to eliminate complacency and disengagement. The bottom line is the worker company relationship is a two-way street. The worker increases your company's value by means of producing, and you compensate them with a livelihood. Contrary to antiquated thoughts about workers, they aren't uneducated, they have dreams, families, and incentives of their own. So just focus on things that bring them genuine value and they'll have an incentive to bring you value.

Growth:

Education, raises, or benefits.

Appreciation:

There's nothing like a sales team getting all the credit, and worse yet, this thought pattern is endemic. Could the sales team sell a dime without referrals and a quality product? No, they couldn't, so make sure your production staff is appreciated. After

COMPLACENCY CURE?

Before we delve in to the nitty-gritty on creative ways to enhance your

While not all methods for combating complacency will match with your preferences, like anything else—the result is what you put in to it. **Try some of these remedies in your workplace to help shrink the threat:**



1. Complete competency evaluations of your staff

- Alternatively, assign those previously deemed competent to observe the behavior of others. Evaluations don't have to be negative, in fact, they are meant to be just the opposite; a tool used to improve performance, correct mistakes, and receive constructive feedback.

2. Offer break times or changes in routine

- Better yet, ask the person about their job – at what point do they 'zone out' – as this is when complacency increases the risk of workplace incidents.
- When we become too comfortable in our schedules or routines, we are more prone to act without thinking. Insert variety in to tasks that are likely to be boring.
- Be accountable. Recognize when you are overworked or need a break. Being overburdened means you are likely to feel tired, putting you and others at increased odds of complacent conduct. Fight the urge to take shortcuts as they increase opportunities for peril.
- If possible, change up some duties required of personnel to add some variety to their job and keep them interested.

3. Increase self-awareness

- This means recognizing your environment and how you are influenced by it.
- Looking at work, situations, or tasks with a 'fresh set of eyes' allows us to more readily identify circumstances that may be putting us in harm's way.
- Work on being 'in the present'. An employee who is disengaged is an immediate red flag for risk.
- 'Listen to your gut'. When we slow down to fully assess a situation, our intuition can give us warning cues – if we're paying attention.

4. Teamwork makes the dream work

- Personnel are so much more driven to participate when they feel as though they are part of a bigger team all working together for an overall purpose, outcome, or solution. The goal is to encourage staff to care about their job and think creatively about how they can participate in successful outcomes – especially for repetitive, boring, or menial tasks.
- Alternatively, assign those previously deemed competent to observe the behavior of others. Evaluations don't have to be negative, in fact, they are meant to be just the opposite; a tool used to improve performance, correct mistakes, and receive constructive feedback.
- Teams can be a great way to work together collectively to practise company values surrounding injury prevention in a way that workers can embrace.
- Teamwork creates a structure of support for an improved sense of confederation and community.

5. Switching between tasks to prevent monotony

- This is a tricky one to manage but it can be done if the duration of each task is just long enough to allow for productivity without the stress of 'keeping up' and not so

7. Reward commitment!

- Reward and compliment. When something is done right it is often ignored. This is an easy fix, compliment fellow employees on a great job and they could have more incentive to do it next time. Likewise, if their hard work goes unnoticed, they're more likely to grow complacent.

When employees feel valued, they are more likely to participate in the greater good of your organization's goals. A happy employee contributes to a positive corporate culture, reduces the likelihood of workplace incidents, and acts as a role model for others. <https://www.trainanddevelop.ca/employee-rewards-program/>

8. Open communication/discussions

- Include company policies and procedures (like safe work procedures, codes of practice, or policies) in toolbox/tailgate meetings or regular weekly/monthly meetings to ensure workers are always thinking about the steps of their jobs. We tend to rush through morning tailgates to focus on the daily work expectations, but it's important to take the time to ensure as much valuable information is provided in a digestible format to ensure the best absorption of that information.

Removing barriers around communication can allow for early anticipation and reporting of issues. Obstacles can create an entryway for complacency to sneak in since human nature is to look for the path of least resistance.

9. Education and training

- Knowledge is power.

Once we know a problem, we can increase awareness of it and are then better equipped to implement preventative measures and respond to it.

Train personnel about safety in their specific environment as well as the statistics of workplace incidents and how complacency is a big part of these numbers.

Since we have all had 'close calls' at work, in traffic, and even putting up our own Christmas lights at times, ask workers to share about a time when they experienced a near miss because of distractions or complacency. This drives home the fact that we are all susceptible to the same risk and heightens our awareness of the stories we hear. It's important to discuss the root causes (including state of mind) and contributing factors (like distractions) giving rise to the problems.

Here's an example of my own:

One weekend, a family friend was doing work on the roof of his home. He wasn't wearing eye protection, although he always encouraged his sons to wear them – 'Do as I say not as I do' type mentality. Unfortunately, when performing the roof repair, he wound up with a nail in his eye. The irony? He was an optometrist.

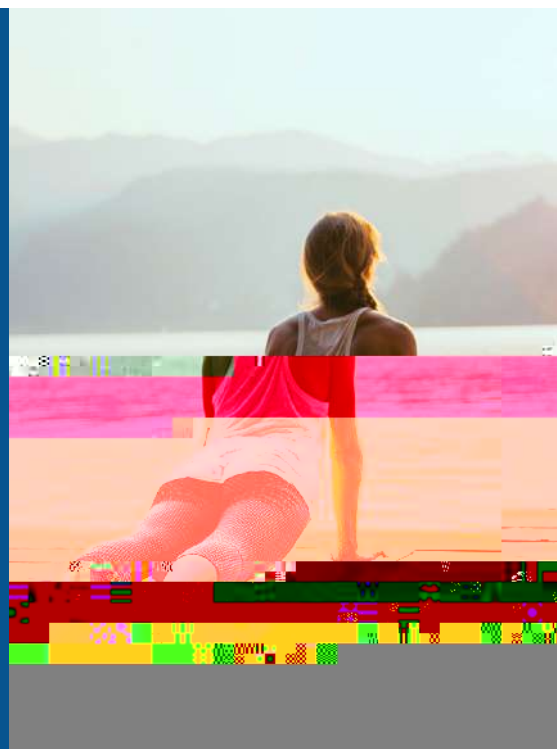
Stories like this remind us that we are all prone to incidents, especially when our focus deviates. Personal stories are critical bits of information we can all relate to. And this one is likely to cross your mind the next time you second-guess wearing eye protection.

Online Training - <https://www.trainanddevelop.ca/online-safety-training/>

10. Wellness

Wellness plays a role in everything we do. Our mood or state of mind affects our attention to the world around us.

- A person's state of mind can lead to distraction. When we are stressed, rushing, frustrated, tired, feeling unwell, or 'too comfortable' in any situation, circumstances are ripe for complacency. Try improving your state of mind with physical activity, stretches, breathing exercises, meditation, or yoga!
- Canadian labor professionals reported a growing recognition that workplaces can be a direct cause of psychological issues like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This means mental illness is now increasingly seen as a workplace injury. A stressful atmosphere may lead to poor performance and unwellness. So evaluating the work atmosphere is a must.



11. Formal hazard assessments

Because of its prevalence, com

12. Improve documentation habits

- Conduct regular inspections – this can identify hazards early.
- Encourage employees to critically examine equipment, tools, environment, procedures, and hazards that may exist before, during, and after their job is complete. They must learn to focus physically and mentally on their work, we could do something 100 times, and the 101st time, something goes wrong – so don't cut corners, no matter how routine the job is.
- Pre-job hazard assessments: review previous corrective actions, previous reports, etc.
- Records of hazard id/near miss/ incident reports all help with early detection the next time.

The goal of implementing any of these measures is to increase and improve employee engagement. Employee engagement refers to the devotion level an employee has toward their employer. The Canadian Human Resources Centre explains that the actions of personnel who are actively engaged in work may include: 'speaking positively about the organization to coworkers, potential employees, and customers. Having a strong desire to be a member of the organization and exert extra effort to contribute to the organization's success.

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Conclusion

Keeping one another safe is a big job, and we all carry responsibility. Whether we are at work or at home, a false sense of security creates a lot of risks. To best manage against these pitfalls, it's critical to conduct training and education exercises. This way, everyone can improve their skills related to focus, increasing our awareness, and creating an environment that supports those objectives for the best results.

As a society, we need to continue to collect, analyze, and share this data so we can continue to manage the risks we monitor. These analyses demonstrate whether our corrective measures are being effective in limiting tragedy and loss from occurring in the workplace. The use of statistics gives us a road map pinpointing where improvements must be made.

As people, we need to invest in ourselves to make sure we are conscious to minimize injury and work to lower risk in all parts of our lives. If we build our lives in a structure that supports minimizing injury, it carries over in all

