

IMPACT OF DECISIONS

By Dwight J. Grimmer

Many years ago, early in my career, I worked on a farm in southern California. During my first day on the job, the farmer issued me a new tractor and informed me that my job would be to cultivate all the crops. He taught me how to set up the blades and shovels on the back of the tractor.

As the blades cut alongside the plant, they would push the dirt into the furrow. The shovels would then come behind and retrench the furrow. Performing this job safely required two people: one to drive the tractor, another to walk behind, observing the action of the implement and communicating adjustments that needed to be made. I was told during training that one person could perform both tasks because the tractor would stay in the furrow by itself. As I continued with this job, I made a habit of climbing over the cultivator once the tractor was moving to walk behind it. I figured that as long as I took my time and was careful, this was a perfectly safe way to perform the job.

I worked for this farmer cultivating for more than a year when I realized that there was no money in being a farmhand. I decided to move to Alaska and on to bigger and better things. The farmer asked me to train my replacement before leaving the farm. I agreed and he hired his brother-in-law to take my place. I trained him the same way that I had been taught: to climb over the cultivator and observe what adjustments needed to be made. It was 6 months after I had moved to Alaska that I received word that the man I had trained was killed. He had slipped while crossing over the cultivator and had fallen into the blades and shovels. This news was hard for me to take as I had taught him to perform the job this way. It still bothers me to this day when



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I stop and think about how my decision helped lead to this man's death.

If only I had been trained and made it a habit to perform this job safely, I would have in turn trained my replacement to do the same. If only I had thought about the impact that my decisions have on myself and others. If only a shortcut would not have been made. If only. . .

Now many years later, I work as a safety professional. Having lived through the days when working safely was an afterthought, I am reminded of the importance of making sound decisions regarding our own safety. It is often your decision whether you become injured or stay safe. It is your decision whether to perform an unsafe act or to do the job the right and safe way. It is your decision whether you follow the safety rules. However, it is not your decision to choose the consequences of your choices and ac-

tions. If you decide to take that shortcut, if you decide to ignore the safety rules that are in place or choose not to wear safety glasses, you are giving up your agency to remain safe and injury free. Keep in mind that it is not only you who your decision may affect; what kind of impact might your poor decision have on those you are training or others working next to you?

There are right and wrong ways to perform your job; please make the right decisions. Be a good example to others: don't take shortcuts; follow the safety procedures for the task; wear your PPE. If you see someone making a wrong decision, don't be afraid to call them out because you may make the difference between this person going home safely or a life-changing event occurring. Your personal actions matter. Let us become the difference in our own safety and the safety of others around us. **PSJ**

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