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SAFETY MATTERS

With problem-solving and order deadlines constantly crowding your mind during the course of an average day, it's still crucial to place safety first—even if it hampers production.

“Safety is as safety does.” Do you really follow stringent safety practices in your facility? During the course of conducting our business, there are so many shops I visit that obviously ignore safe practices in favor of higher production that it is a real wonder that incidents of serious injury aren't higher than they already are.

Now, I don't mean that we purposely promote unsafe practices in our shops, but we all have production requirements to consider, and this mindset can make us miss the obvious unsafe practices that are all around us. I know that I am sometimes guilty of this myself, and I'm sure that none of us can truly say that the first concern on our minds when we are at work is always safety.

The other day I was helping one of our employees with a problem he was having, and our resolution involved bypassing one of the safety features on this particular machine. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but when I got back to my office and sat down at my desk, I realized that I had just committed the very sin that I'm constantly preaching against. I had put production ahead of safety. Of course, I immediately returned to the machine and corrected my error, and fortunately no injury had been caused as a result of my momentary lack of good judgment. But I shudder to think of what could have happened—and I would have been the one who was entirely at fault! It's my job as supervisor to think of safety, even to the detriment of production, and if this employee had been hurt or seriously injured, not only would that have been on my shoulders, but he would have been perfectly justified in blaming the company, even to the extent of filing a lawsuit.


How many of us, however inadvertently, have had similar experiences? I'd be willing to bet that each one of you reading this column can think of at least one time that you have ignored or even suggested a method of work that was not in the best interest of safety. Many times I have personally bypassed a safe practice when working on a piece of equipment, thinking that I had enough experience not to get hurt. Of course, as a result, I sometimes hurt myself, and then I really feel dumb. But “do as I say and not as I do” is not an adequate response. How can I expect my employees to watch me and then not emulate what I do? Therefore, we all have to remember that safety is as safety does!

One thing on all of our minds this month is the upcoming IMTS show. Of course, we are all looking forward to September and the chance to see all of the new machines and techniques that are typically available

at IMTS every two years, and I hope you all have a chance to attend. However, if this is not in your plans, magazines such as *Gear Solutions* are already previewing the newest technologies that are now available and will be shown at IMTS. As you learn about these new designs—whether at the show or in magazine articles—please consider the safety aspects of these machines and technologies. View them not only from the standpoint of a possible purchase, but also in terms of the safety innovations they possess that you can incorporate into your existing operation. I know that it's hard to think of safety with all the exciting

displays, and with salespeople vying for your attention and promoting how much faster and more accurate their product performs, but put “How is this product going to improve the safety of my

employees?” on your list of questions. This one simple question should be answered in very positive terms, and if it is not, view the product with a very jaundiced eye. Safer operation needs to be right up there with improved production and return on investment.

That said, I hope to run into you at the show! 

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

With more than 30 years of experience in the gear industry, Terry McDonald is a manager with Repair Parts, Inc., a partner with Re-New Machine & Maintenance, Inc., and a current member and past-chairman of the American National Standards Institute B11.11 Subcommittee on Safety Requirements for Construction, Care, and Use of Gear Cutting Equipment. McDonald writes this monthly column specifically for *Gear Solutions* magazine. He can be contacted through the magazine at editor@gearsolutionsonline.com. Responses and reactions to his column are also welcome.