

## Safety Opine #3 April 27, 2020

### Critical but not Condescending and Contentious Conversations about Safety

*Let us make a special effort to stop communicating with each other, so we can have some conversation.* - Mark Twain

It has been my experience that in times like these people can have very strong feelings driven by fear. If fear is driving conversations people can become condescending and contentious when it comes to safety. With all the opinions about how to work safe without spreading the virus further, it is no wonder people are confused. In the end, a decision will be made that is likely not popular to many and at best acceptable to others. It is critical that we keep our conversations open and civil in a time when the landscape is changing with every up and down shift of datapoints.

The market itself is more volatile today due to conversations that travel at the speed of sound. In history you can find instances where a king might send a message on parchment via runners that took days and maybe weeks to be delivered to its intended recipient. Ships carrying dispatches to generals calling for a cease-fire in the field would take months to arrive while people continued to die. Even when the message was sent there was no guarantee that the receiver would heed instructions. Today it happens fast but humans still use their own beliefs and values to decide how to interpret and act on the message.

To all that read this: *Today we are on track to prevent the spread of COVID-19... that is the desired result from our conversations.* That does not mean that we are all in the same place. Some state's governors have introduced guidelines to reopen businesses this week while other have extended previously stated guidelines. In many states, the governors have issued guidelines to be interpreted by mayors. And likewise, business owners and executives are making decisions and issuing their guidelines for returning to work.

It is easy for all of us to get caught up in the question of motives when it comes to conversation. Some are willing to leave home and face the virus with a bravado that says, "I ain't scared!" When in fact, they may be trembling inside. Many of these are people who lack resources to stay home because they live paycheck to paycheck. Others who have enough money saved say, "Stay at home and stop the spread!" And there are those whose potential health risks determines their willingness to return to a traditional workplace. One's motives, beliefs, and values will create their part of the conversation.

We look to those who are "knowing" and they are saying, "We don't really know what this will do." We must realize that we've never been down this road before as a nation. We are not at the end of this thing; we are in the middle, at best. Data will continue to emerge, but meanwhile decisions are being made without benefit of all the data – and rightly so. (Remember the old adage "paralysis of analysis".) We cannot wait for a complete set of data

that will never be delivered. When it comes to creating a workplace where it is difficult to spread the virus, it is critical that we keep the conversation going.

Keep conversations going by:

1. Sticking to the facts that matter. If a barrier such as a mask will slow water particles from flying across the room and infecting others, then everyone who has a mask should wear it.
2. Be positive, but truthful in response to a question. Civility means not being judgmental or sarcastic in your response. It tends to shut people down and make them defensive when receiving your response.
3. Apply grace and humility to the conversation. Don't be the smartest person in the conversation. Seek data and input from those who have it to offer. We all have strong opinions and want to be heard (I know I do!)

This opine of mine is just a conversation starter. If you are currently working, making plans for returning the business back to the economy, or you are an employee whose company is calling you back, be ready for a good conversation that is critical but not condescending and contentious about safety.

As always, if I can be of service in advising you in mitigation strategies and tactics for creating a workplace where it is difficult to get hurt, please email me at: [carl@safetyinstitute.com](mailto:carl@safetyinstitute.com)

Be Safe!

Carl Potter, CSP

CarlPotter.com