LADDER SAFETY: What's Wrong with this Picture?

Read the following scenario; ask participants to take on the roles of Mike, Joe and the foreman. After reading the story, participants should identify all the **wrong** things that the workers did when working with ladders; discuss the RIGHT way to work safely on a ladder.

Roles: Mike and Joe, the workers and Mr. Smith, the foreman

INTRODUCTION:

Joe and Mike are excited; they just got the call to work on the new residential construction project in the area. They don't have much experience, but the pay is good, and they want to use this job as a stepping stone to bigger and better jobs. It's their first day on the job.

SCENE ONE: The foreman's office

Mr. Smith: So you know how to work on ladders, right guys?

Joe: Well, I haven't had a lot of experience, so maybe you could just go over the basics…

Mr. Smith: Well, I have to take this delivery, and I thought you told me you had lots of experience – where was your last job, anyway? We've got a deadline on this project, so….

Mike: Don't worry, Mr. Smith, I'll explain it all to him. I used ladders a lot on my last job.

Unsafe Work:
"What's wrong with this picture?"

Mr. Smith: Okay. First you need to paint the trim around the top of the building, and then, go inside and finish with the painting in the lobby. There are a couple of extension ladders out here, and a couple of step ladders inside. One of you should work out here, and the other start inside. Are you sure you know what to do? I asked them to find me some experienced guys, not rookies…

Mike: We're fine, Mr. Smith. We'll call you if we have any questions.

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SCENE TWO: Mike and Joe are outside setting up.
Mike: So Joe, you work out here, and I'll do the inside work, okay?

Joe: Sure, but can you help me to set up here? Is this extension ladder okay, and how do I set it up?

Mike: Well, first you should inspect it. Of course the ladder needs to be long enough to reach the top, and it has to be able to hold you. So check the information on the ladder. It says it's a Type I – I'm not sure what that means, but I think it has something to do with your weight. How heavy are you?

Joe: About 260 pounds – I've been eating like a horse lately. I have to get back to the gym.

Mike: Well, that should be good enough. And how long is the ladder, and how high to the roof?

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Joe: It says it's a 24-foot ladder, and the building is about 20 feet tall.

Mike: Okay, that should work. Just be careful if you're climbing onto the roof.

Joe: Am I supposed to check the ladder before using it?

Mike: Yeah, but this one looks fine to me.

Joe: Well, the step pads are ripped, and there is no pad on one of the feet – won't that make it uneven?

Mike: Just wrap some of this tape around it to even it off. I don't want to be asking for too much on our first day, you know?

Joe: This bolt seems a bit loose, and the pulley rope is a bit frayed. I wonder how that happened…and the steps feel like they have some kind of slippery stuff on them…

Mike: So just wipe them off. Listen, we need to get started here…

Joe: Okay, okay, let's just set up then. Where should I start?

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Mike: Start over by the doorway; it's early in the day, so not many people should be walking in and out. If you see anyone, just yell. And it's windy already, and it's supposed to get worse later on, so be careful.

Joe: Okay. The ground is pretty uneven here with all these rocks. And do I need to worry about those electrical wires? They seem like they are pretty close to the ladder.

Mike: Man, you ask a lot of questions, dude! Let's get this set up. Okay, you need to set this up at the right angle to make sure you don't fall. I remember that the ratio is 1 foot of length from the wall for every…every 5 feet of height, I think. So the building is 20 feet high, so put the ladder 4 feet from the wall.

Joe: That seems a little steep, doesn't it?

Mike: No, that's right. And remember that if we do well on this job, we get another one with this company, so we need to move fast. I will be inside, so don't keep calling me to help you. Carry the paint up with you – try to bring up a couple of cans the first time up to save time.

Joe: Should I try to tie the ladder to something so it doesn't move?

Mike: Don't worry about it moving at the top; just use this rope to tie the ladder to this bicycle stand.

Joe: And who left all these cans and plants around? Someone is going to trip on this stuff!

Mike: Yeah, yeah, don't worry about it; someone may be looking to use the stuff, so leave it there for now. I'm going inside to start on the lobby; I'll take one of these step ladders. See you later.

Joe: Yeah, see you.

Unsafe Work:
"What's wrong with this picture both inside and outside?

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SCENE THREE: Mike is inside, using the step ladder.

Mr. Smith: Hey Mike, how's it going?

Mike: Great, Mr. Smith, this is a great job.

Mr. Smith: Be careful, you should not be sitting on the ladder, and before I saw you standing on the top step.

Mike: Oh, don't worry, Mr. Smith, I can handle myself on a ladder – I've been working with my father for years doing this kind of work.

Mr. Smith: Okay, but try not to lean so far; just get down and walk the ladder closer, okay?

Mike: No problem, Mr. Smith, I'm a good worker, and I work fast. Suddenly, they hear Joe yelling from outside, and then they hear a "thud." They run outside to see what happened.

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Consider the Ladder Safety scenario to complete this worksheet.

1. Are there any problems with Joe's and Mike's ladder work?

2. What could have been the reason for Joe's fall?

3. Do you think Mike is working safely? Why or why not?

SOURCE: Construction Safety & Health Fall Hazards, Central New York COSH, 2007, OSHA grant product