

A Man Walks into a Bar By Rian Murray



This past weekend I went to a popular bar to listen to live music. Instead of enjoying some funky grooves, I spent the majority of the evening trying to order a drink while a steady stream of vivacious young coeds continued to get served before me. I know, I know—at this stage in my life, I *should* expect that sort of thing. That’s what society would have you believe. The older man is the second-class citizen of the bar scene. But the more I thought about it, the more I didn’t want to stand for it. Despite my graying goatee and growing dependency on Rogaine—tremendous product by the way—my money was still as green as theirs and I should’ve been treated as such.

Then it struck me. Could this be a metaphor for business practices today? Absolutely.

If the single-minded bartender symbolizes a results-driven company and those enticing damsels represent the marketing analysts of the world, then, we, the middle-aged men of the bar scene, stand for the average customer—unnoticed, unsatisfied, and in many ways, unsung.

At Justellus, our goal is to help the bartender understand that, while the young women may appear the more glamorous option, it’s the middle-aged man that’s going to drink more. Much more.

We want to make it clear that chart trends and marketing strategies, while attractive, cannot take the place of you, the customer, and your vital feedback. After all, you’re the one that’s buying their product or service—you should get a say too!

So like Justellus, at the end of the night I offered the gentleman behind the bar some constructive “feedback” and I can guarantee it’s going to improve his services in the future.

Left Uncovered
By Rian Murray

No one is immune to Mother Nature's wrath. This has never been more evident with the natural disasters in Japan, New Orleans, and Haiti still fresh our minds. The advent of social media has pictures of tattered homes and displaced families reaching mass audiences with startling immediacy—forcing us to contemplate the one thing nobody wants to consider: the possibility of a natural disaster affecting us in a similar way.

Fortunately for many of us, we are comforted with the foreknowledge that in the event we do experience a natural disaster, we have the safety blanket of home insurance to cover the damages.

Well, that wasn't so in Jen Tolbert's case.

Last spring, a hail storm caused irreparable damage to Jen's roof. In fact, the storm was so bad that the majority of the homes in her neighborhood needed replacement roofs. Home owner's insurance covered the neighbor's new roofs, including Jen's immediate neighbors whom she happens to share a townhouse with, but it wouldn't cover Jen's.

After a roofing contractor told Tolbert that Erie Insurance has a reputation for denying such claims, she began writing letters. Erie responded by sending out a third party company to survey the damage. They concluded that it did not incur enough damage to warrant a replacement roof—even though her neighbors, whom share the same structure with her, were approved for a new roof. More letters produced a similar result: another company came out to assess the damage, but would not approve a new roof.

Frustrated by their lack of understanding, she sent a letter to the company's president asking for fair treatment. In a return letter, the president of Erie Insurance likened her situation to those that experience a tornado; one house can be completely ruined by a tornado while nearby homes remain unharmed. But comparing a hail storm to a tornado? It reminds me of the scene in *The Big Lebowski* when an intruder drops The Dude's bowling ball and asks, "What the hell is that?!" To which The Dude responds, "Obviously, you're not a golfer, man."

If it were me, I would've written back with the following multiple choice question:

Hail is defined as "a showery precipitation in the form of irregular pellets or balls of ice more than $\frac{1}{5}$ in. (5 mm) in diameter, falling from a cumulonimbus cloud over a geographical area." Which of the following natural phenomena is most unlike hail?

- A.) Rain
- B.) Snow
- C.) A Tornado

While a tornado may cause more damage, hail is more consistent in its destruction—affecting homes of a certain area equally. Still, the company would not budge.

Despite being a model customer to Erie Insurance since 1996—always pays her bills on time,

minimal claims, even goes through Erie for her family's car insurance—her legitimate claim has been denied. She continues to fight for the fair coverage all of her neighbors have received from their insurance companies.

Lead Contamination Makes Ghost Town of Pitcher, Oklahoma

Submitted by rmurray on Mon, 01/31/2011 - 12:16

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[Pitcher, Oklahoma](#) was once a small, sleepy town—content to remain quiet and out of the news. Most of its residents were satisfied with the subtle nuances that make small town living appealing. But the local mine replaced this dream of the simple life with a new set of nightmarish realities once lead had covered the land.

The town suffered collective poisoning due to the negligent operation of the mine and was declared a hazardous waste site in 1981. It was no longer safe to live there and doing so was considered both risky and dangerous. Still, many residents remained in the hopes of reclaiming their beloved hometown.

That once shining hope has since faded to a dim glimmer as recent years have seen one after another of its essential institutions close down—awaiting their inevitable demolition. All the schools have closed. The town government is a thing of the past and the post office has been torn down. Restaurants, shops, and even funeral parlors have been bought out by the federal government, which has claimed more than 900 businesses.

Sink holes have become the newest menace plaguing the city. The old mining shafts that tunnel under the city threaten to gulp down the remaining buildings—relegating the land to a large scale quicksand pit—making it virtually uninhabitable.

Only one local business lingers: a small pharmacy operated by a gentleman named Gary Linderman, who refuses to close out of an obligation to the handful of residents that have steadfastly persisted through the troubling times—and time is not on his side, nor the town's side. This is the last stand of a hopeless town—a consequence of industrial recklessness.

Relief for Lead Victims in La Oroya, Peru

Submitted by rmurray on Thu, 01/20/2011 - 06:37

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I used to have a coach who'd tell us that every game was comprised of many little battles—that eventually, if you played the game the right way, the little triumphs would add up to a team victory—the ultimate goal. Well, the game is long from over, but the environmental community has just won another small battle.

As recounted in the Earth Justice article, "[Peruvian Court Orders Relief for Victims of Lead Poisoning by US-Owned Smelter](#)," a four year legal battle has just concluded calling for Peru's Ministry of Health to provide health care and relief to all victims of the lead-poisoning. La Oroya, a small mountain town in Peru, has been enduring the brunt of the lead industry for the last half-century. Smelters and mines have infected the land and the people with lead, causing significant damage to both humans and the landscape. In court, government officials were told to put the public health of their people ahead of any agreement they may have had with the responsible party.

And who, you might ask, is the responsible party in this case? None other than the Missouri-based Doe Run Corporation, who some of you may remember from one of my earlier blogs titled, "[America's Largest Lead Producer Must Take Corrective Measures for Environmental Violations to the Tune of \\$65 Million](#)." Suffice it to say that Doe Run is no stranger to poisoning a community.

NOTE: Doe Run is owned by the Renco Group, who's CEO is billionaire Ira Rennert, otherwise known as "[America's Worst Private Polluter](#)."

A little while ago, I noticed a comment from the Doe Run Corporation after the blog detailing their environmental violation. Obviously, it gave Doe Run some bad press. But there was nothing in the blog that was made up. Facts are facts. It's not slander if it's true. So in a world where every corporation must uphold at least an image of serving the public good—even if they have no intention of doing so—they felt the need to respond with this:

"Doe Run is working hard to get within compliance, but it is difficult to mine and process lead and stay within the EPA rules, and still be competitive in the global market. If you notice, they are the only lead company left standing in the U.S. because all of the others have been sued out of business. Doe Run is doing things to reverse the environmental and worker exposure to lead, such as proper signing, communicating and switching to decontamination products and systems that work better. They are now using government recommended Hygenall products for their workers and better air handling systems wash procedures, better waste management practices and they are proactively working in the streets to mitigate lead."

The problem with the statement is that in no place does it express remorse over poisoning millions of people. In no place does it say how they intend to help the families poisoned by their

mines and smelters. Their focus is staying “competitive in the global market,” or simply put, profiting. The health or well-being of the surrounding populace is not of their concern—or at least it wasn’t. That is until they had to fork over 65 million. Funny how a place like Doe Run changes its tune once they endure a fine of that size. Now image-conscious and environmentally friendly, they’re trying to rebuild their severed brand on our watch? Give me a break.

As that old, punchy coach used to say, “Don’t tell me how you’re going to do something. Show me.”

The Longest Lead Study in US History Concludes

Submitted by rmurray on Wed, 01/05/2011 - 13:00

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A study performed by Kim Dietrich, a University of Cincinnati scientist, on the affects of lead in children has linked lead poisoning with not only learning disabilities in children, but also anti-social and even criminal behavior in both teenagers and adults. It stresses the permanent nature of lead poisoning, going so far as to prove with empirical data that the brain damage resulting from lead poisoning is irreversible.

The study, the longest of its kind, has recently concluded. Blood analysis and associated tests taken from young children—now adults—born between 1979-1984 have shown the cumulative affect lead has on children as well as how it continues to affect them into adulthood.

[In this Cincinnati Enquirer article](#), writer Peggy O'Farrelly sums up some of the study's findings:

“In 1993, the researchers published a study showing that preschoolers who'd been exposed to lead prenatally and in infancy had IQ deficits; higher blood lead levels were linked to lower IQ levels.

In 2008, the group published the first study showing an association between prenatal and blood lead levels and higher rates of criminal arrests, including for crimes involving violence, among 19- to 24-year-olds. Arrest rates were highest among those individuals with the highest blood lead levels measured in early childhood.

In 2009, the group published the first study showing that childhood lead exposure causes permanent brain damage with lifelong consequences. Dietrich and co-author Kim Cecil, a brain imaging specialist at Cincinnati Children's, used functional MRI technology to show the damage done to the brain.”

Dietrich collected the data from over 300 families located in inner-city Cleveland, a known hot-bed for lead.

To play devil's advocate, one might say that urban areas almost always have a higher crime rate than other areas because the poverty is higher. Any psychologist will tell you that many children born into poverty feel trapped in their economic state and opt into criminal behavior in a last ditch effort improve their lifestyle.

One may also be inclined to deduce that lead poisoning could contribute to that kind of flawed logic.

Holiday Decorating: Festive Family Fun or Toxic Tradition?

Submitted by rmurray on Wed, 12/08/2010 - 13:17

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It's the holiday season and besides pushing your way through the packed malls in a vain attempt at, not-so much purchasing a gift, but simply narrowing down your options—wives and girlfriends don't give lists because "you should know what I want by now and if you don't then you should've been listening"—you have other little tasks, namely decorating your house so the neighbors refrain from referring to you as Harry Humbug.

So you take to the basement to unravel the holiday lights that you so carelessly and lethargically balled up and stuffed in a box at the conclusion of last winter. After disentangling the rat's nest of lights, you grab your rickety ladder, staple-gun, and morph into Clark W. Griswold for a few hours.

It is at this point that you enlist the help of little Sparky. Little Sparky stands at the base of the warped ladder and methodically feeds you line upon line of lights while you desperately cling to the top rung just trying to escape the whole ordeal without a serious injury.

And just like that, it's over. You're back on the couch, clicker-in-hand, sipping spiked eggnog and watching college football.

But is it really over?

An [article](#) in the *Bloomberg News* says think again. Jeff Plungi writes, "Fifty-four percent of holiday lights tested in a U.S. study have more lead than regulators permit in children's products, with some strands containing more than 30 times those levels."

Items made out of vinyl have been known to have high concentrations of lead in them. Holiday lights as well as bulbs are coated in vinyl causing anyone who touches them unnecessary exposure to the toxin.

Annual occurrences that were once seen as nothing more than innocent family tradition, such as putting up the lights or decorating a Christmas tree, are now known to be hazardous.

Take these precautions:

- 1.) Test your lights for lead before decorating your house or the tree
- 2.) Use gloves.
- 3.) Make sure little Sparky washes his hands before diving headfirst into his post-decorating cup of hot-chocolate.

Suburban New York Family Poisoned by Lead in Tap Water

Submitted by rmurray on Tue, 09/21/2010 - 14:17

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[Little by little the symptoms began to pile up for this suburban New York family.](#) One family member became sick, then another, and then another. Joint pain. Muscle fatigue. Stomach pains. Nausea. Confusion. Sounds like the side effects for a popular new drug doesn't it? These were just some of the symptoms the New York family experienced.

Finally, after a few doctor visits and tests, the whole family was diagnosed with lead poisoning. The *whole* family.

Eager to get to the bottom of it, they brought in some specialists to investigate. Since the home was built in the 1960's, the specialists assumed that the problem was caused from lead-based paint. That was not the case.

And so the problem remained unsolved—until the dog began acting erratically.

The family cocker spaniel, known for being overtly affectionate, had begun to display some hostile behavior—so much so that they sought a clinical opinion. Bella, as it turned out, had a ridiculously high blood lead level, which posed the question: what's the common denominator here?

The one commonality between them was the drinking water. They both drank directly from the tap. The pipelines connected to an old storage tank that had been rusted out from years of use. Once it became known that the family had publicly voiced displeasure over their lead-poisoning, the tank was replaced. Then it took a couple weeks before the health department tested. By then—of course—it tested negative for lead. It should be noted that the health department never actually tested the family's kitchen for lead, just the pipeline.

One of the scariest things about lead in water is that there isn't a defining taste that tells you something is wrong. In other words, it's not distinctive. Leaded water tastes just like regular water.

Water flows through pipelines and if the pipes are old enough, the lead could leach from the pipe into the streaming water, making your drinking water poisonous. The best advice is to test it or better yet, once you become aware of these symptoms, go get checked.

Blog Series: False Information Regarding LeadCheck® Swabs

Submitted by rmurray on Mon, 08/23/2010 - 14:17

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The internet is a strange place filled with all kinds of information and opinions. The more you surf the net, the more unfounded drivel you're likely to subject yourself to. Baseless, unsupported opinion masquerades as fact in this medium more than any other.

Think about it. Anyone can blog. Anyone can comment on discussion boards and websites. And as much as freedom of speech defines us as a country, it can also be a detriment to those of us who have a yearning for the truth.

It becomes a detriment when a writer spreads false information with such stubborn conviction that it's almost impossible to change his or her mind.

Someone who is adamant in their stance is more likely to convince people that they are right—even if they're not. This is how false information spreads.

There's a great quote on this by the legendary writer Mark Twain:

"It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure *that just ain't so.*"

I know what you're thinking: so what does this have to do with LeadCheck® Swabs or the RRP Rule? Currently, there is a lot of false information circulating the internet message boards about our product and I'd like to set the record straight.

It's been said that it is unreliable. I've read that it doesn't work. I've even seen comments stating that they're not available anywhere. Where do people come up with this information? So much for journalistic integrity.

And why such negativity?

If you submit to Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' theory that there are [Five Stages of Grief](#) for every tragedy or undesired occurrence and apply it to the inception of the RRP Rule, then you, the

contractor, most likely have gone through the first three stages by now: denial, anger, and bargaining.

You now find yourselves solely in the fourth stage: *depression*.

If you're still angry about the rule, then psychologically-speaking, you're not as evolved as the others. Conversely, if you've already accepted the rule and are working diligently to comply, then you are ahead of the game, psychologically-speaking.

Fair or unfair, our product is associated with the RRP Rule. For most renovators, the RRP Rule elicits a negative response and that carries over to our product; even though we have been around for over twenty years. Our goal has never been to corner the market. From the outset in 1987, our goal has remained the same: we aim to protect families from lead. This gets lost in the shuffle too much.

In his iconic scene in *Jerry Maguire*, Tom Cruise laments:

“We live in a cynical world. A cynical world. And we work in a business of tough competitors...”

He goes on to woo Renée Zellweger's character by announcing, “You complete me.” In essence, finding the positive in a competitive world of negatives.

I intend to do the same in a series of blogs dedicated to addressing common misconceptions surrounding our product as well as its strengths and weaknesses in relation to other lead testing devices.

And the next and final stage of Kubler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief, well, that's acceptance. We'll see if we can get you there.

Part two will be posted tomorrow: LeadCheck® Swabs vs. XRF Gun