

Business Case for Safety: Use Victim Accounts to Humanize Need for MSD Prevention



Across Canada, musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs):

- Have the highest lost-time claim costs of any injury;
- Lead all injuries in number of lost time work days; and
- Account for between 20% and 60% of every \$1.00 of total workers' comp claims.

Yeah, But Can You Name Them'

These statistics are all very impressive, especially if you're an OHS coordinator trying to build a business case for MSD prevention. The problem is that they're just that'statistics. Numbers can never do justice to the human costs of work injuries. And while that's true of all injuries, the coldness of the numbers really comes into play when you're dealing with a nonfatal hazard like MSDs.

After all, MSDs don't actually kill people. All they do is inflict career- and life-destroying pain and misery that makes victims wish they were dead. So while you'll need the metrics to document ROI, you can add human emotion to your business case for MSD prevention investment by recounting the stories of real-life victims.

Better yet, you can let the victims tell their own stories in their own words. Here are 5 such personal victim accounts to get you started. You may also want to share these accounts with your supervisors so that they can use them to humanize their ergonomics training and demonstrate to workers that MSDs are flesh-and-blood real.

MEET:

PHIL RITTER



'My name is Phil Ritter. My story begins when I was a 26-year-old site coordinator at a construction site where I often operated jackhammers.

'One day, I noticed a tingling at the very tip of my fingers like the stabbing of needles. The pain grew worse and worse. I couldn't sleep, hold a newspaper or a fork. I had to drive my truck open handed to get a grip on the wheel. I was taking 22 aspirin a day.

'I was diagnosed with RSI (repetitive stress injury) and carpal tunnel syndrome. I had to have surgery. It was a long recovery. I couldn't even put my socks on for the first 3weeks.

'But I turned out to be luckier than most. Six months later, I went back to work and learned how to protect myself from MSDs. I learned to relax the hands so as not to grip the tools too hard, to protect myself from vibration, and so on.

'And I learned something else. There *is* a safe way. Victims of MSDs are too often told that it's all in their mind. This is not true. My advice to the workers out there is to learn the safe way and to ask somebody if they're not sure.'

JAMES POWELL

'My name is James Powell. I am 60 years old. I am married to Connie and we have 2 grown children, Cynthia and Catherine.

'I have worked at Safeway since 1971. I was a meat cutter. As meat cutters, we work in very cold temperatures and there is a great deal of stress on the shoulder from lifting and cutting meat. My shoulder had been bothering me for some time. When I could no longer lift my right arm without the help of my other arm, I went to the doctor. An MRI showed a tear in my rotator cuff.

'I have had 3 surgeries and I am still unable to return to my position at Safeway. I now need another surgery.

'I have lost my job. I have fallen way behind on our bills. My daughter has taken on the responsibility of paying our bills. She has had to take on a second job. I am no longer able to fish like I used to.'

HENRIETTE BARCLAY

'My name is Henriette Barclay. I'm 60 years old. I am married. My husband, Harlan, and I have no children.

'I worked for a national drug store chain as a shift supervisor, stocker, and pretty much anything else that was needed. On April 26, 2004, I was helping to unload a truck. When I picked up one of the crates, I heard a pop in my right

shoulder. After 15 minutes, I couldn't move. I was in extreme pain. I had torn my rotator cuff.

'I have had 3 surgeries, and my injury is still not corrected. The last MRI showed a tear that had been there all along, but had not been repaired.

'I've lost 3 years of income, as I'm unable to work because of my shoulder injury. My shoulder is getting worse, instead of better. I used to love to do Country Dancing, but I can't reach my arm over my head any long. I used to knit and crochet, but now I get so frustrated that I usually end up crying. I can no longer reach, pick up anything over 1 pound, do the laundry, or even blow dry my hair.'

GARY WOODFORD

'My name is Gary Woodford. I'm 49. I worked for 26 years for C&S Propellers assembling and installing propellers on military and civilian aircraft. My job required me to lift propeller assemblies that weighed over 100 pounds.

'One day, I was lifting a propeller assembly dome, weighing 150 pounds, for a C 130 military plane into place so I could install it. I felt a sharp pain in my back and had to stop. I called my co-worker for help. I had injured 2 discs, which were pressing on my spinal cord.

'My life hasn't been the same since. I can't hike, camp, run or do anything active.'

JOE BAKER (as described by his widow, Desi)

'My name is Desi Baker, and this is the story of my beloved, now-deceased, husband, Joe, who died at age 45.

'Joe was a wonderful man, husband, father and sportsman. He was a hard worker, and helped to raise his stepdaughter and stepson. He worked for 25 years as a welder and machinist. Two decades of lifting and bending heavy steel wore out two discs in Joe's back. Joe was in constant pain and became deeply depressed. He couldn't sleep, fish, or eat. He was 6' 2' but weighed just 135 lbs. He slept 1 or 2 hours a night in the garage.

'Things took a turn for the worse when workers' comp denied Joe's treatment; that and the constant pain eventually drove Joe to shoot himself. After Joe's suicide, I lost my husband and best friend.?