

Where Is The Compassion?

By Loren Meyers Plantwide Safety Chairman

Hello all my fellow union brothers and sisters. I want to thank all who got out and voted at the Triennial Elections. I pray I can rise to the level of other chairmen before me. One in particular that comes to mind is Steve Mitchell who is sadly no longer with us. Steve was a mentor, friend and one of the most honest and honorable individuals I have ever met. When I was elected as Safety Sub commiteeman in 2006 I meet Steve, or "Stretch" as people called him and it fit him perfectly. Steve was a towering 6'7 intimidating character at first but when I got to know him he was the most intelligent and compassionate individual I have ever meet. Steve gave years of service to his UAW brothers and sisters as safety chairman out of duty and compassion for his fellow members. Many of our members now have 5 years or less at Caterpillar and may not have heard of Steve Mitchell but if you are curious about this selfless individual and want to learn more about him, I suggest you go out to the UAW 974 website click on safety chairman, scroll down to Safety Articles and read his safety letters. The letters are a treasure trove of this individual's intellect and compassion for all working members in everyday hazardous working conditions. He is sorely missed.

October 6, 7 & 8, 2020 was our annual UAW/Cat safety conference. For anyone that doesn't know what this event is about, it's a contractual agreement that all UAW Safety Divisional Chairman and their Caterpillar Safety counter representatives come together once a year to give a joint presentation of their facility efforts to mitigate unsafe working conditions and injuries. Since Caterpillar is paying for this and hosting this event the joint part of this conference is far from the company's definition of Values in Action. For this to be a joint effort both parties should be allowed to participate equally in their facility presentation but that is not the case. Facility presentations are done by the Caterpillar safety professional and they may or may not let UAW Divisional chairman have any input or even see it until it is presented. I am the acting Safety Chairman for KK and I had no clue what the presentation was about this year. Nor have I ever been introduced the person giving the presentation. So this is the level of professional courtesy that has been the norm with management as of late. Due to Covid 19 restrictions, this year's joint conference, that is normally held at a Caterpillar's designated facility. It was held through virtual internet which allowed connecting the entire UAW safety divisional chairman located at the Union Hall to all the Caterpillar Safety professionals at their social distancing locations.

Out of all the facility presentations the one consistent push was to reward individuals with gifts and trinkets for safety recognition. Caterpillar safety recognition is starting to look like Chucky Cheese.

1. Penny Recognition? (The concept sounds like Jellybean of the month club)
2. Scratch off tickets to collect for prizes up to fifty dollars that a person can choose from a glass case in the gift shop.
3. And last but not least all the free pizza you want.

These types of programs have a history of pushing individuals to NOT report accidents in an effort to not cause animosity with their peers who choose differently and thus being the reason everybody lost their pizza. I have had multiple UAW members expressing these incidents happening. Once again I hope that

any unsafe working condition or injury is being reported and our UAW members are being compassionate and supporting to their fellow UAW member.

The week of October 6th, 7th and 8th when I was away for UAW/ Caterpillar Safety conference a UAW member was stung by something in his workstation at first it just got discolored but then swelled. The employee did everything right reporting the incident to management which resulted in being medically treated. The employee's experience was very stressful, to say the least. Less than two days after the incident had occurred, the employee received a letter from workmen's compensation stating that the injury was deemed non occupational. When the employee received the letter he was unaware that an incident investigation had even occurred. He had talked to no one doing any investigation. The employee felt that the company was indicating that he was giving false information that could result in termination which caused him much stress. This went on for a couple of weeks until they changed the injury to a recordable. I discussed this incident with our Cat safety professional because someone (management) had gone to the workstation. This person reported that there were no insects present at that time that he could see. So, according to management, there are no insects in KK at all. That is ludicrous! Since working in BLDG KK since 2002, I have swatted bees from my garbage, been stung by mosquitos, have heard multiple members speak of incidents with cockroaches. Less than three weeks from the date of this letter I was in my assigned workstation reaching for a part when a foot long praying mantis was wanting to scrap with me. I am exaggerating; of course, it was more like 3 inches. Of course, it's odd that there are no insects in the building when we are dodging the mice, rats, cats, possums and the traps put in the building to catch the pigeons flying around defecating everywhere. Management needs to come out of their climate controlled office more. I told the Cat safety professional that I was tempted to take a picture of the praying mantis as Proof and his comment to me was **"it is probably going to get to that"**. I asked him "where has all the compassion gone".

I must stress to all our UAW members that you must report your injuries as soon as possible to the company and to your union steward or UAW safety representative. Now that has been said, I know we all have incidents that happen we don't feel at first are serious but if bruising, pain, stiffness and swelling occur, report it. I have talked with several UAW members through the years and the fear of retaliation is their biggest complaint. Intimidation is Caterpillar's goal, blame the worker to improve their safety metrics. I have witnessed several employees wearing back braces, tendonitis supports, finger splints and wonder if those injuries were work related and not reported. **Retaliation by an employer for injury on the job is illegal.** We are here to help.

In 2008, a UAW member was terminated for falsifying information on post offer Questionnaire which provides several places for an employee to record any significant medical history or past injuries. When the UAW member injured himself at the company while lifting a tote, which was part of his normal job duties. He did not immediately report the injury because he felt **"it wasn't that bad"**. The UAW member didn't receive any treatment for the injury from Caterpillar medical. He worked for several days after injury, but his supervisor told him to report to company medical department to get checked out. He filled out an incident report form and on the form he reported to Caterpillar medical that during desert storm 1991 he injured his back during an incident with a helicopter called a hard landing. Because he

didn't report the helicopter incident on the questionnaire, the UAW member was terminated. A grievance was filed and the member was reinstated and made whole in 2012 after the Arbitrator agreed with Grievant decision not to list the 1991 injury. The arbitrators analysis said ***In the ordinary course of life (and especially in a physically-demanding job), people sprain , strain, and twist various parts of the bodies. It is inconceivable and unrealistic to require a new employee to remember and list every single strain, sprain, and twist that he has experienced throughout the course of his lifetime. Grievant listed medical conditions that where serious including his depression and the broken ankle, on the Questionnaire Depression and breaking nine bones in the ankle are serious medical conditions which the company has a right to know about; a 17-year old back strain that required only Motrin for treatment is not.*** When reporting your accident, be very careful what you say. Be honest but give only information that is relevant to the incident at hand. Too many unnecessary words can lead to your words getting twisted and used against you. There is a good Safety Article by Steve Mitchell (***Making Liars out of Honest Men and Women***). Again, this can be found on the UAW974 website. This particular article is dated 2/2014.

I want to again thank you for trusting me in this position. I'd like to leave you with some words from Steve Mitchell's article.....

"I want everyone to maintain their integrity. Tell the truth and resist the temptation to become a liar. Report all symptoms of injury and stick together, don't let yourselves be divided. Insist that your health and safety issues be addressed to your satisfaction by your boss or ask for your UAW Health and Safety Representative to assist you in making your workplace safer for you and others."