

Full Circle – A work health and safety evolution

GABRIELLE DARCY – SQET DOCUMENT AND SYSTEMS COORDINATOR – AUSTUBE MILLS: To just see the person that he is now, and the shift in when he talks about how it was for him and how it is now is just incredible. Like, not a lot of people could do that.

NIGEL SMITH – WORKCOVER SAFETY AMBASSADOR, PARALYMPIAN, FORMER AUSTUBE MILLS EMPLOYEE: My name's Nigel Smith. I was working at Tubemakers for a bit over 12 months before the accident.

It was just like a family...well, a big family company to work for.

Yeah, it was a really good place to work.

KEVIN BAKER, MANUFACTURING OPERATOR, AUSTUBE MILLS: 7th of December, '93, the accident happened.

INTERVIEWER: So, you were one of the first people on the scene?

KEVIN BAKER: I was one of the first there, yes.

NIGEL SMITH: Everything was going along fine, till we had a jam-up on the conveyor.

KEVIN BAKER: Nigel didn't know the...the whole workings of the machine.

NIGEL SMITH: I stopped the machine, climbed up on the conveyor, and moved some of the product back over to the correct position.

KEVIN BAKER: Flipped the tube over.

As soon as the tube hit the prox, it automatically took off.

NIGEL SMITH: And I was actually standing on the machine, and had my leg between two plates.

When it took off, it just knocked me off, and I fell down, and it picked up the next brace.

KEVIN BAKER: If he hadn't...

If Matt hadn't have stopped the machine, another three feet, Nigel would have been cut in half.

It was pretty horrific.

NIGEL SMITH: I shattered both the bones, right down near my ankle. Tore about 50% of my calf muscle off.

I had a big laceration, went right around my thigh - right down to the bone.

So, it was about 12 months before I actually lost my leg.

Yeah, I know that a couple of my bosses are going to be there tomorrow, that I worked for.

And Kevy Baker will be there tomorrow.

He was the first...first-aid person there on site that helped me.

So, it'll be an interesting conversation, I guess, to talk with Kevy.

KEVIN BAKER: - I'd just made a cup of coffee...

NIGEL SMITH: - Yeah?

KEVIN BAKER: ..when Matt started blowing the horn.

"What's going on?"

And I looked around. I could see Matt. Then I've seen this other helmet.

"He shouldn't bloody be there."

NIGEL SMITH: Still makes the same noise?

KEVIN BAKER: Yeah, mate. Except for your scream.

Yeah. I could actually hear it before the whistle.

NIGEL SMITH: Right.

KEVIN BAKER: I couldn't work out where it had come from. When Matt started blowing that whistle...

NIGEL SMITH: Yeah.

Gone down, around the corner, and looked down.

I've worked here for 46 years in August.

INTERVIEWER: Seen some changes.

KEVIN BAKER: A lot of changes.

DAVID GOMEZ, PRODUCTION SUPERINTENDENT, AUSTUBE MILLS: This site's always been really good in storytelling, and using storytelling to actually trigger something in people to really trigger why safety is important.

GARRY MEAGHER, MANAGER, SAFETY, QUALITY, ENVIRONMENT AND TRAINING, AUSTUBE MILLS: Because we now think about potential consequence, rather than actual consequence, we actually get to learn from what could have been the tragedy, in finding a near miss or an incident that could have harmed someone.

So, we still treat it the same way.

GABRIELLE DARCY: And I've come into a really good culture, a really good, strong business that's thriving.

So, to hear about how things used to be, how the culture used to be, is quite surprising, and really sometimes not believable.

KEVIN BAKER: There was no culture like there is now.

Like, we used to just...Sometimes you wouldn't even turn the power off.

You'd just get in, fix the machine up - that was it.

NIGEL SMITH: The whole safety culture in the workplace has change dramatically.

You know, back then, you know, workplace safety - it was sort of optional.

DAVID GOMEZ: I think the pride now on this site is a pride of everyone being involved in safety, and safety being everyone's business - not just management's business.

As the Acting Operations Manager at the moment, that's one of the biggest things I'm proud of - this site.

GABRIELLE DARCY: We educate our people now. Even though it happened 20 or 30 or 40 years ago, we still remind our people that it did happen, and why it happened, and that it plays a really important part of how we are now and who we are now.

Because that emotionally drives people to be safe at work, and to look after themselves and their workmates, because they don't want anything like that to ever happen to them.

RICHARD CLEMENT, GENERAL MANAGER, AUSTUBE MILLS: And I think that it's very unique that you can have an individual who's had a very serious incident who can come back and talk 22 years later to a group of people, and some of us were his workmates at that time.

NIGEL SMITH: I was like your average 25-year-old.

You know, I was flat-out everywhere and into everything.

You know, I led a really active life.

After my accident, it took me quite a while to get back into living any sort of normal lifestyle.

You know, I went through a long period of feeling sorry for myself. But I realised that I had this group of people around me who had propped me up and supported me through, you know, what I can only describe as the toughest times in my life.

That the way I was living was affecting these people I guess was enough of an inspiration for me to get up and have a go, and, you know, really find out what I could do -because I had no idea while I was sitting in the corner, crying about it all.

Up until last week, when I came back and actually sat down and spoke to Kevy about it, and that, you know it really reinforced to me how we just don't understand; we don't know the full impact.

There's so many people's lives that are affected when somebody gets hurt.

KEVIN BAKER: Yeah, I have been through it. And I don't, do not...want anyone to go through it.

I would not like to see anyone go through it.

Because it's not worth having your mate injured, maimed, or anything like that.

That's just too horrific.

And you don't get it out of your mind.

Like, this happened back in '93, and I can still remember everything.....as if it was yesterday.

GARRY MEAGHER: I think if I had to say to Nigel...First of all, from a business, we'd have to say that we are very sorry that that incident happened to him.

I'd like to make him feel comfortable, I think, around that out of that incident, we've never had another horrific incident on this site, like we did that day.

DAVID GOMEZ: So, one of the things, I guess, that Nigel can take away from this as well is knowing that he has potentially prevented the next couple of injuries from happening in that area.

KEVIN BAKER: Years ago, before Nigel's accident, we talked about safety.

Was anything sort of done about it?

No.

Today? Yeah. Safety's...Years ago, it was down here. Where it is now - it's way up here, or above.

It's...it just keeps going.

And it's getting better and better.

NIGEL SMITH: Coming full circle, it's great to be coming back to the place where I had the accident, and to try and help with safety there.

But I think it is a little bit dangerous to assume that we have come full circle and come to a conclusion.

You know, this is the start of the journey of working safely.

You know, we can't rely on the fact that we've made it.

You know, we do have to keep striving for a safe workplace.

DAVID GOMEZ: You know, I've got a 17-year-old son and a 15-year-old daughter.

Some of the ways that I judge a workplace is whether I would let my son or daughter work in this workplace.

And I guess I'm proud enough to say that on this site, I would have no hesitation to let my son work in this place.

Can I say that about every other industry?

I'm not sure if I can, yeah.

KEVIN BAKER: You look after each other. That's what we're here for.

If you don't look after each other, it's a waste of time being here.

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