

# DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE IMPACT RATIONALIZATION CAN HAVE ON YOUR SAFETY PROGRAM.

By Jay Johnston

The very cornerstone of any safety program is awareness and yet 98% of all accidents are related to some form of Rationalization.

In the movie "The Big Chill" actor Jeff Goldblum's character categorically states: "*Don't knock rationalizations – they're more important than sex*". To which his friend replies: "*Aw, nothing is more important than sex*". The first man answers with this question: "*Have you ever made it through a whole day without a juicy rationalization?*"

## Defining the Problem:

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the word **Rationalize** as follows: "*To make (something irrational) appear rational or reasonable*". "*To justify (as one's behavior or weaknesses) reasons especially to oneself.*"

For safety purposes, I'm going to define **Rationalization** as an *unconscious lapse in our proactive thinking*. Rationalizations are those quiet compromises that we all make everyday.

Many examples could include: failure to buckle a seat belt, failure to use a turn signal, failure to adhere to speed limits, failure to use chock blocks, failure to document vehicle maintenance logs, failure to document training, failure to document service work, failure to adhere to out-of-gas procedures, failure evaluate code compliance issues on a new or existing customers, failure to observe no smoking rules, failure to use protective eyewear/gloves and clothing, failure to utilize proper lifting equipment, failure to **buy** proper lifting equipment, failure to document vendor training... the list could go on and on.

## With the stakes being so high, how is it that we can rationalize factual exposures?

Truth be told, our subconscious mind helps us weigh the odds and somehow we are convinced that certain exposures are acceptable. Well maybe, not *consciously acceptable* – they simply fall into the back end of a long work list. Doing your best becomes a subjective process.

*When you are up to your ass in alligators, trying to drain the swamp – your one saving grace is the fact that they all probably won't bite you at once.*

## **Add this formula to the equation ...**

Consumer rationalization = Double the Exposure.

Another example would be **consumers who rationalize** do-it-yourself work or the use of untrained professionals to install or repair appliances. Saving a few bucks is the rationalization. The odds are in their favor, or so it would seem. Until an incident occurs. At this time **they will rationalize their own part in the process and point the finger straight at you.**

## **Solutions Offered:**

- Make a quiet list observing your own safety related rationalizations.
- Next to each subject write down the worst-case scenario consequences.
- Carry this piece of paper around with you and add to the list when you come to each new situation.
- Start with just a day or so at the beginning of each month. (We are looking for awareness not another burdensome task).
- The very act of documenting your observations will help put them in perspective
- Cross off issues as you deal with them proactively.
- Have the Courage to share your observations with co-workers and friends.
- Have the Courage to share key “high priority “ issues with supervisors or at the next safety meeting.
- Demonstrate that you care by being aware.

## **Lastly, I want to leave you with a true story about rationalization.**

A few weekends ago, my outboard motor caught on fire with 15-gallons of fresh gas in the on board tank (6 inches from the flames). In a blink of an eye I realized what was happening, grabbed the fire extinguisher and put out the fire.

It turns out that a spark plug wire was pulled out of the rubber boot by a hook on the motor cover and that ignited the fumes from a cold choke start. The flash in turn blew off an internal fuel line. The odds were well over 100 to 1.

The real story is that a few weeks ago I had checked the fire extinguisher and found it had lost its charge. I replaced the extinguisher with a new one a few days later. That old extinguisher may have been unusable for months, maybe even going back to last fall. Imagine the alternative scenario where I grab for the extinguisher and it does not work. Water would not put out a gas fire. I would have been lucky to dive off the boat and watch it burn and explode. Worse yet, it could have been my kids on the boat with a bad extinguisher.

Thank God I crossed off that rationalization and took responsibility for replacing that extinguisher. That's the way it goes for all of us everyday.

## **Maybe it is not that rationalizations are more important than sex ... we just have them more often.**

Examine and challenge your own rationalizations, what ever they may be.

Make a list. Cross them off.

## **The life you save may be your own.**

*For more information on how to solve your insurance problems or how Jay's management programs Protect Assets, Prevent Injuries and Save Lives contact [Jay@TheSafetyLeader.com](mailto:Jay@TheSafetyLeader.com) or call 952-253-2710.*

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