

# CARING ENOUGH TO INTERVENE

BY GREGORY A. McCOUN

When I was a young engineer, fresh out of college, I was working at a chemical facility in my home state of Louisiana. One day at work, the entire production unit I was assigned to was shut down due to a leak in a product exchanger, located on the fourth level of the seven-level structure. Restarting the unit required the replacement of the exchanger.

Due to the project's importance, we had two of the company's best mechanics leading the job. These were industry veterans, well-respected both in their field and on our jobsite. Yet, making my way up the stairs, I noticed the rigging used to pull the exchanger into the structure was installed incorrectly.

I froze. I knew what I was seeing was wrong, but I let doubt get the best of me. The experience of our mechanics, especially when compared to my inexperience, caused me to hesitate and not immediately intervene. In the blink of an eye, the exchanger broke free and was like a battering ram, slamming across the unit. Fortunately, no one was seriously injured. It did, however, forever change my view and behavior on intervention.

## LEADING WITH CARE

To my younger, inexperienced self, intervention felt like I was daring to challenge more experienced people. It was as if I was telling an expert how to do their job, or worse, that they had made a critical mistake. Yet, at the root of intervention is a heart of caring. It's not about someone being right or wrong, but instead is about taking the time to collectively come to an understanding regarding the conditions in which we work. Drawing attention to unsafe work and stopping work shows we truly care about the wellbeing of our coworkers, trade partners, customers, and families.

## HOW DO WE DO THIS?

Establishing a culture open to intervention and hazard recognition training for employees is critical. An employee is much likelier to intervene if they understand they have the right to stop work and have been trained in how to intervene.

When an incident arises, a given worker's depth of knowledge and training pays dividends in the form of fast, informed decisions that can save lives. To take this further, I am convinced that interventions are a key measure of a successful safety culture. It measures employees' hazard recognition, willingness to act, and fellow employees' acceptance all in one KPI. I have found the very best safety cultures celebrate interventions routinely. At Austin, we double down by taking advantage of our technology to track and measure interventions at our sites. We utilize this data, along with other key indicators, to identify hazardous conditions and prevent incidents and injuries.

## SAFETY IS OUR PRIMARY CORE VALUE

We have more than 7,000 owners of our company who share our core values of safety, service, integrity, and ownership. More than just words in our employee handbook, these values describe who we are as a company. They describe not just what we do, but how we do it: we safeguard the health and wellbeing of others daily and pledge to do all we can to protect those who work on our jobsites.

## EXTENDING OUR REACH

When we truly embrace our values described above, it becomes personal, a way of being. We then have opportunities to intervene in many areas of our life, with our families, our friends, our neighbors, and our community. We might offer eye or hearing protection to a neighbor caring for their lawn. We stop a family member from standing on a stool or the top step of a ladder. We encourage our communities to slow down in our subdivisions and watch out for kids.

Because we lead with care, our work will never be done. We work in complex, challenging locations, environments that require utmost vigilance. And, so, we will continue to lean into doing the hard work of safety: anticipating problems, asking questions, and always caring enough to intervene.



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