



044: Horseplay

Background

We all like a good laugh. The occasional prank can be a real tension-reliever. However, a prank can also turn deadly.

Usually, minor jokes and pranks escalate, each one pushing the envelope a little bit more until the game of oneupsmanship turns deadly serious or until the foreman intervenes.

What is acceptable?

The legal boundaries of acceptable joking are shrinking.

What may seem funny to you may not be funny to another person. For example, racial and ethnic labels might seem to be a real riot, but they can cause deep hurt and resentment.

With budgets tighter, you cannot afford to waste time with elaborate pranks.

The United States has set a new record for layoffs each year since the government first started tracking layoffs in 1995. Using company time to practice being an out-of-work comedian simply isn't wise.

We know horseplay is just plain stupid most of the time. Lectures about not doing it don't drive the point home. Common sense does. We simply need to apply that and recognize when we're not acting in our best interests or those of our company.

The dangers

Practical jokes often start an increasingly dangerous upward spiral that ends in termination or injury.

Practical jokes can erode working relationships and interfere with the mentality that each of us must watch out for the good of the other in this dangerous line of work.

Workplace violence often has roots in workplace practical jokes. It's easy to hit a raw nerve on someone's bad day. To some people, every day is a bad day.

Physical horseplay often leads to injury.

Physical horseplay can lead to violence or be interpreted as such. Even if you are just joking around, others may not know this.

Options

The goal of horseplay is often to relieve job-related stress or boredom. There are other ways. Here are some suggestions.

- Start a Code Quiz or Safety Quiz game, much like "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?" or some other game show. You do not need to be a foreman to do this, but it would help if you coordinated such an effort with your foreman.
- Keep a list of positive things you notice about the people you work with. Add to it each day. For example, you might notice that Joe was working on a ladder and stayed off the top rung and Mary tested a GFCI before using it. You can choose to share this information, or just be inspired by it.

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Think of an example where horseplay on the job went seriously wrong. Share this example with your crew.

What this Safety Talk covers:

Some issues regarding horseplay and practical jokes.

Discussion notes :

