CASE TITLE: A Cracking Surprise

Disclaimer: This case study was prepared by Natalie Okal under the supervision of Dr. Frances Tuer, DeGroote School of Business, solely for the purpose of discussion. While the injury in the case actually took place all details of person(s) and organization(s) have been disguised.

**The Injury:**

On the Thursday before Christmas holidays, Derek Karr was working on a routine oil change on a Kenworth T680 transport truck. The Kenworth had a stainless-steel bumper common for the model. Being at the end of December, there had been a massive snowfall throughout the day which caused a lot of water to pool as snow melted in the shop. Puddles were everywhere and very difficult to avoid as they were in integral areas like the parts section and around the trucks themselves.

As he was working on the oil change, Derek stepped off the truck to put away the oil hose but as he stepped off the truck, one of his feet slipped off the wet bumper. He tried to grab onto the truck but fell backwards a couple of feet to the ground, hitting his head on the corner of a battery that was on the ground. The impact of the fall cracked the casing of the battery and knocked Derek out. When he woke up, his coworkers were all around him, and he felt immediate pain in his head. He touched the back of his head to confirm whether he had cracked his head open or not and realized he was bleeding. Before he could say anything, the owner of the shop, instead of calling an ambulance, put Derek in his truck and dropped him off at the hospital, returning to work right after.

**Who and What?**

Derek has been working with ABC123 Truck and Trailer Repairs for only five months and needs this job to complete his apprenticeship hours as a 310T mechanic. He has experience with working on transport trucks but was newly registered as a truck and trailer apprentice. The owner of the shop was friends with Derek’s previous employer who helped him receive the job. Ultimately, Derek had a lot of pressure on him to do well after his last boss referred him to his current place of work.

With that said, the shop wasn’t regularly cleaned and would go years at a time before the buildup of oil, grease, coolant and other liquids were wiped down or squeegeed. The owner also had a habit of keeping rusted metals, a lot of used batteries and ultimately junk all around the inside the shop with the hopes of salvaging them for money at scrap yards.

**Background on this Type of Injury:**

Under the Canada Occupational Health and Safety Regulations (SOR/86-304); Part II Permanent Structures continued, subsection Housekeeping and Maintenance it states that (2018):

2.14(2) "All dust, dirt, waste, and scrap materials in every workplace in a building shall be removed as often as is necessary to protect the health and safety of employees and shall be disposed of in such a manner that the health and safety of employees is not endangered.”

2.14(3) "Every traveled surface in a workplace shall be

(a) Slip-resistant; and

(b) Kept free of splinters, holes, loose boards and tiles and similar defects.”

According to legislation, it is the employer’s responsibility to ensure a workplace is maintained and cleaned for the safety of its employees. With that said, it also requires the owner to clear junk, clutter or scrap materials that can cause potential harm. As well as making sure the traveled surfaces within a workplace is slip resistant, whether that means squeegeeing the floor every time or putting effective PPE's (personal protective equipment) in place.

According to the WSIB report builder who was filtered for head injuries in the trade and skilled transport and Equipment Operator occupation equaling “machinery and transportation equipment mechanics (except for motor vehicles)” it states that against all age groups within this category there has been 64 reports between 2011-2017 (2018). The 15-19-year-old category consisted of 5% of those reports and 6% of 20-24- year-olds who reported head injuries between 2011-2107. However, when looking at 2017 alone, there were only 4 reports and none of them were within the ages of 15-24-years of age.

It is safe to assume that as a starting apprentice, the last thing they would want to do is to report a workplace injury or hazard for fear of dismissal, as there is always a need for apprentices in the workplace. However, this is extremely dangerous, and even though there are 0 reports in 2017, this is not an accurate representation of the actual injuries caused. The numbers of reports continue to decrease when explicitly examining falls that cause a head injury to 1 report and it was in the 30-34-year old age category.

PPE’s that are currently used within the industry to mitigate risks like this consist of step ladders instead of stepping onto a truck bumper, as well as having 3 points of contact when on a vehicle at all times and properly storing/throwing out junk materials. According to Workplace Safety & Prevention Services, Batteries must be stored in a cool, dry ventilated area, away from smoke or open flames (2014). There is a significant focus on ventilation as they can discharge acids vapors and spills and possibly rupture. Lastly, the majority of shops will clean, wipe down and ensure that the floors are dry, non-slip surfaces with no traces of the grease, coolants, oil, water and other liquids that can cause harm.

**What’s Next?**

On the ride to the hospital, Derek was concerned about what he should tell the doctor. One option was to tell the truth about what happened at work. The second option was to lie and say it happened during a break outside the shop with no connection to the corresponding job. The first option would result filing a claim to the WSIB, starting an investigation, and documenting everything that happened, potentially resulting in a lot of issues and fines for the shop owner. Since he was a new apprentice at ABC123 Truck and Trailer Repairs, Derek didn’t want to create any more drama. The shop felt like a family setting, and he was scared it could alter the incident. However, by reporting, he could actually end up getting some safety precautions for clean floors, more frequent and thorough inspections which would overall improve a safe work experience.

After being examined, Derek was told he had a severe concussion and needed 4 staples in the back of his head to close the split. He was still unsure what story he’d use to explain what caused his accident. To lie or not to lie; that was his question to answer… and quickly.