On The Grind

Disclaimer: This case study was prepared by Nicole O'Halloran and Jacqueline DiRenzo under the supervision of Dr. Frances Tuer, DeGroote School of Business, solely for discussion. While the injury in the case took place all details of person(s) and organization(s) have been disguised.

**The Injury/Illness:**

Josh Pennington had just begun his first week as a labourer when he was asked to help his supervisor install a fence for a client. Despite all prior experience, Josh was not familiar with fence installations, but didn’t mention this to his supervisor to avoid appearing incompetent. After bringing all the materials into the yard and preparing for installation, Josh’s supervisor realized that some of the wooden posts were too long. He asked Josh to use an angle grinder to cut down the posts to the correct size. Josh went to go use the grinder, but due to lack of proper training, was unaware that angle grinders are used for hard materials like metal, tiles, and concrete, not wood. As Josh was cutting the wood, he hit a knot in the beam which caused the angle grinder jerk out of his hands and drop onto his thigh. Josh’s supervisor had previously removed the safety guard on the blade, so the grinder landed on his thigh, cut through his clothing and directly into his flesh. Josh screamed in pain, causing his supervisor to sprint over to see what was wrong. If Josh’s scream wasn’t cause for alarm, the bleeding was. His supervisor immediately called an ambulance and started applying first aid in hopes to stop the bleeding.

**Background Information:**

Josh Pennington was a 21-year-old laborer in Hamilton, Ontario. Josh enjoys his work but had a difficult time feeling comfortable expressing his concerns openly due to his coworkers often acting as if they were invincible and had no need no personal protective equipment (PPE). Although many of his coworkers have experienced minor injuries, nothing had been reported. Josh figured that this was the nature of the construction industry. Josh was shy but hardworking and determined to succeed, but how health and safety was often portrayed as a laughing matter and significant lack of PPE outside of steel-toe boots and hard hats made him nervous.

**Background on this type of injury:**

An angle grinder is a handheld power tool used for cutting, polishing and grinding. It is typically used on materials such as metal, concrete, tile and stone. The tool has a variety of discs, such as sanding discs, cut-off discs and polishing discs, that can be changed depending on the job being done (Angle Grinder Safety, 2016). The discs that typically come with an angle grinder are not well suited for cutting wood, and a knot in the wood can cause a terrible kickback. Kickback is when the angle grinder suddenly thrusts back towards the operator as a result of it grabbing or jamming on the materials being worked on (Directions, 2016). In order to cut wood, the operator must purchase discs specifically tailored to carving. Angle grinders are often referred to as the most dangerous power tool by many trades. The most common injuries associated with angle grinders are lacerations due to kickbacks or discs that shatter (Angle Grinder Safety, 2016). Although there are no official Canadian statistics of kickback injuries from the use of an angle grinder, there were nearly 25,000 injuries while using this tool in United States in 2008 (HILTI, n.d.).

Several injuries and misuses of the tool occurred in Saskatchewan in 2016. For example, a worker at a structural steel facility in Regina, was using an angle grinder when the disc suddenly shattered, and a piece got stuck in his face (Johnson, 2016). According to Ken Bricketts, the executive director of the Safety Association of Saskatchewan Manufacturers, this type of injury is “not particularly rare” (Johnson, 2016). To aid in reducing injuries due to angle grinders and other abrasive wheels, John Kuntz, a St. Gobain Abrasives sales representative, has begun abrasives safety classes at Saskatchewan Polytechnic (Colman, 2016). Since these classes have begun, the school has had no grinder injuries and has seen a reduction in tool repairs due to misuse (Colman, 2016). When using angle grinders, it is important to ensure the workplace is clear of any potential hazards and proper PPE is being worn including a face shield, hearing protection, a long-sleeved shirt jacket, pants or overalls, safety boots with steel toecaps and cut-resistant gloves (Darlington, 2016).

**What to do next?**

After his injury, Josh could not help but think about how the situation could have been prevented if he was using proper equipment and received proper training. He had never been injured in the workplace before and was unsure of what to do. The negative attitude towards safety at work made Josh very apprehensive about filing a report. He just started at this new position in a company with a lot of potential for growth and didn’t want to disturb things. In addition, he didn’t want to damage his relationships and reputation with his new coworkers; after all, construction is rough work. The injury required some stitches but wasn’t awful, there was no infection so he wondered whether if it was really worth reporting. Despite all of this, Josh knows that the current state of health and safety at work was in desperate need of improvement and he feels that reporting his injury may be a step in the right direction. While sitting in the hospital, a nurse asks Josh if he plans on filing a report. What should he do?