

# PIPELINE

PIPING SYSTEMS INC.

COMMERCIAL/INDUSTRIAL/INSTITUTIONAL MECHANICAL CONTRACTORS

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## How An Apprentice Helped Validate Our Safety First Culture

by Pauline Lally

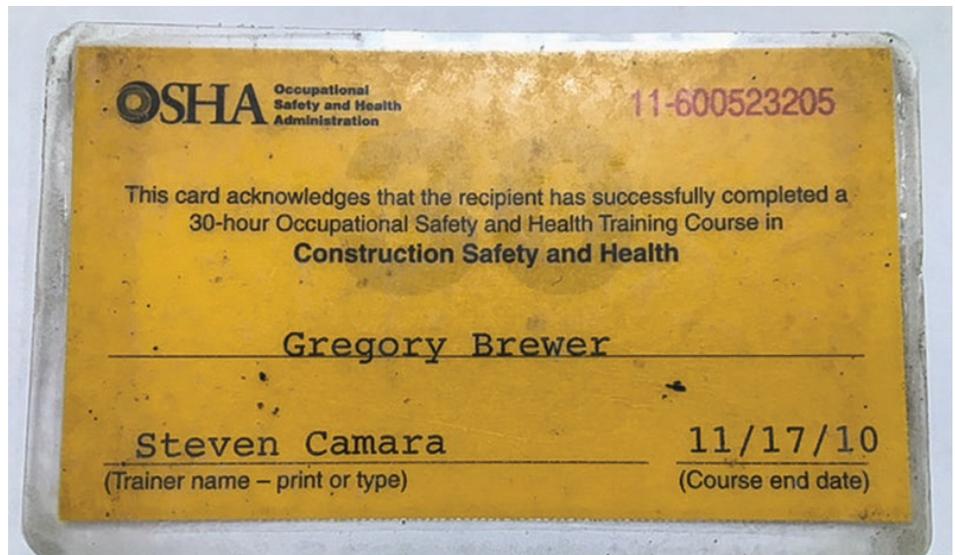
**W**hen you think about PSI, you're likely to have been influenced by one of our innovative service offerings, like our "3-men on call" policy. For example, we never say "Sorry, we're too busy" to handle your emergency call because we always have at least three trained techs standing by—24/7—to intercept your unplanned situation.

But behind the scenes is the other half of our story: Innovative operations that keep costs down and safety first. Of course, safety has been part of PSI's institutional DNA since 1971 and it's ingrained into every employee from the moment they're hired—no matter what their job title.

But let me pull back the curtain and share another big part of what drives our commitment to safety.

About 10 years ago PSI joined a consortium of open shop contractors who started a self-insurance group (SIG) for workers compensation insurance. An anomaly in Massachusetts (only four or five have been allowed), a company must pass stringent criteria to belong. The group was formed by a contractors who wanted to be proactive about workers' comp claims and the frustration of having a third-party (i.e., insurance company) manage claims which oftentimes was counter to the contractor's best interests.

In order to belong to the SIG, first we had to strengthen our safety program with



the overriding philosophy that "being safe" is paramount at all times—front picture, front page transparency. We never forget we work in a potentially life or death arena.

Second, we had to commit to monthly safety meetings and a quarterly, all-hands-on-deck Safety Day. Here's the way Greg Brewer, our service manager, describes the activities behind our commitment.

"My job is to keep everybody up to OSHA standards. I make sure everybody wears steel tips, safety glasses, and they're not doing anything stupid. I administer the tool box talks, which are required by OSHA. I talk about how if a guy's in a lift, he's got to have a harness and safety

glasses, and hard hat. If he's working in a trench, he needs a trench box. If he's doing confined space work, we've got to monitor his atmosphere so he doesn't pass out.

"We do in-house training and outside training. We have experts come in to train and certify us. Whether it's CPR, operating a fork lift or a scissor lift, or confined space training, we make sure everybody's competent and that they watch out for each other on the job."

Because we belong to this SIG, I estimate that PSI has saved 20%-25% per year in premiums compared to traditional insurance rates. Our in-house administrator makes sure we manage claims fairly, but

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# The Science Behind Creative Thinking

Creativity may seem mysterious and magical, but scientists have been studying it for a long time. From the *Fast Company* website, here's some of what they've learned:

- **Creative insights do come in the shower.** In one study, 72% of participants reported getting new ideas while taking a shower.
- **Solitude boosts creativity.** The networks in our brains responsible for creativity and imagination work better when we're alone.
- **Trying new things helps.** New experiences can trigger dopamine, a neurotransmitter that facilitates mental flexibility.
- **Trust your hunches.** Intuition isn't well understood, but it's led to many creative insights. Learn to let your unconscious mind noodle on problems and ideas without forcing your brain to work.
- **Daydreaming has positive effects.**

Daydreams can enhance creative thought, self-awareness, and long-term planning by giving you a kind of mental incubation for ideas.



## One Way to Solve a Problem

A farmer invested his savings in building a pond to raise fish for sale. But after he stocked the pond, he discovered he would soon have a problem. A friend warned him that kids from the nearby town liked to sneak into farmers' ponds to go swimming. The farmer knew they would stir up the muddy bottom and kill off his fish.

One evening the farmer, carrying a pail, went down to the pond. Sure enough, a bunch of young people were getting ready to dive in. They outnumbered the lone farmer and showed no signs of fearing him. In fact, they taunted him and dared him to drive them off. But he simply reached in the pail and started tossing chunks of raw meat into the water.

"What are you doing?" asked the trespassers.  
The farmer shrugged. "Just feeding the alligator."

## More People Taking Advantage of Technology

The digital revolution continues gaining ground, according to the Pew Research Center. Seventy-seven percent of Americans own a smartphone, a figure that's almost doubled since Pew began tracking smartphone ownership in 2011.

Similarly, broadband access is on an upswing, with home broadband service rising 6% in 2016 (after a slight decline from 2013 to 2015). In November 2016, nearly three-quarters (73%) of Americans reported having broadband service.

Finally, 69% of U.S. adults are using social media, especially young people—86% of 18- to 29-year-olds are regularly using at least one social media platform.

"Light tomorrow with today."

—Elizabeth Barrett Browning

# A Frugal Family Tradition

An accountant's thriving business in a small Scottish town had been in the family for generations. The main offices were in an old building, and clients had to walk up a single marble step to reach the front door. Over time, the marble step wore away until a deep dent developed in it from all the footsteps.

One day, the accountant asked a stonemason to take a look and tell him how much a new marble step would cost. The stonemason looked at the step and then scratched his head.

"It'll be a big job," said the stonemason. "But I suppose I could give you a new step for £100."

The accountant frowned. "That's a bit more than I wanted to pay." They both looked at the step, and then the accountant turned to the stonemason: "What if you dug up the step, turned it over, and put it back into the ground? Then it would be good as new."

The stonemason agreed. "£20."

"Do it," said the accountant, and he went back inside the office.

An hour later the stonemason rang the bell. The accountant opened the door and saw the stonemason standing in a hole with the step. A nearly identical dent was evident on the other side.

The stonemason chuckled. "From the looks of it, I'd say your great-great-great-grandfather thought of the same thing about 150 years ago."

SPEED BUMP

Dave Coverly



# Don't Overwork Yourself in Pursuit of Success

Working hard is important in any career, but overwork can lead to exhaustion, illness, lower productivity, and burnout. You may think you have to work 80 hours a week, but before you collapse, analyze your load to determine whether you need to cut back:



- **Look at your co-workers.** If they're achieving the same results while logging fewer hours, you probably need to work smarter, rather than harder. Consider stepping off the treadmill long enough to get some mentoring, coaching, or training assistance before you burn out.
- **Listen to how others describe you.** If colleagues, supervisors, and direct reports reliably refer to you as "hardworking," "dedicated," and/or "committed" before listing attributes such as "visionary" and "innovative," you might be focusing more on quantity of work rather than quality.

- **Check your reserves.** If you're working at or near full capacity every day and return home with no energy left, you're stretching yourself too thin. Not only do you risk sinking under the burden, but you won't have enough time (or energy) to take advantage of the next great work challenge that comes your way.

## Enhance Your Success With Kindness

Nice people can finish first, insists Lisa Kaplan Thaler and Robin Koval in their book *The Power of Nice: How to Conquer the Business World with Kindness* (Currency). The book's core tenets remain worthy of consideration. Improve your "NiceQ" with these exercises:

- Be kind to yourself so it's easier to be nice to others.
- Share credit and treat everyone with respect instead of "kissing up and kicking down."
- Say "no" when necessary—but present it in a positive light. When turning down an assignment, help find someone else who can take it on.
- Plant seeds of kindness by doing five nice things every day that have no quick payoff.
- Complete the following statement "If I were a kinder person I would..." and then act on it.

## Disengaged Millennials Hunting for New Jobs

An overwhelming majority of millennials aren't terribly interested in their existing jobs, according to new research from *Gallup*. The research found that 71% of employees born between 1980 and 1996 are either not engaged or actively disengaged at work.

Disengaged employees are usually short-timers. Nearly half of them—47%—say they plan to switch jobs during the next 12 months, as long as the overall employment picture brightens.

Millennials will represent about half the workforce in just three years; the cohort behind them, Generation Z, will probably exhibit many of the same preferences.



In Canada, beaver tails are beaver tails, but Beaver-Tails are what?

## Trivial Matters

1) If Alexander Graham Bell had his way, how would we answer the phone?

- a) "Huzzah"
- b) "Howdy"
- c) "Cheerio"
- d) "Ahoy"

2) Who was Shakespeare's wife?

- a) Jennifer Lawrence
- b) Amy Adams
- c) Kate Winslet
- d) Anne Hathaway

3) Which Girl Scout confections pack the most cookies per box?

- a) Samoas
- b) Tagalongs
- c) Thin Mints
- d) Do-si-dos

4) In Canada, beaver tails are beaver tails, but Beaver-Tails are what?

- a) Deep-fried pastries
- b) Battery-powered noisemakers
- c) Trick kites
- d) Hand-carved wind chimes

5) Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khamenei banned which accessories as symbols of Western decadence?

- a) Neckties
- b) Wristwatches
- c) Sunglasses
- d) Flip-flops

—from *mental\_floss*

**Answers:** 1) d (Thomas Edison popularized "hello.")  
2) d 3) c (There are 28 cookies in each box.) 4) a 5) a (In public, former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad typically wore a business suit with an open-collared shirt. Current President Hassan Rouhani wears more traditional dress, again without a necktie.)

# Safety First Culture... *continued from page 1*

people don't slack or file fraudulent claims. We have a lot more control over this very important element of our business than most high-risk, high-tech companies. Consequently, we're able to funnel these savings back into more safety training and into keeping our customers' costs down. But most importantly, it has enabled us to weave safety practices into our work culture.

PSI puts our money where our values are to keep this laser attention on safety. I personally believe in "getting the behavior you reward," so I incentivize our technicians to qualify for their "30-hour OSHA cards," an OSHA certification that is three times greater than what is required (techs must have a 10-Hour OSHA card to be employed in our industry.) As soon as they accomplish this goal, they earn a \$300 bonus. I'm very proud to report that more than half of my techs have earned this distinction, a bigger percentage (and a bigger number of techs) than any other process piping company in our region.

Not too long ago, I witnessed a "funny" story that

demonstrated just how effective PSI's safety training is. We recently hired the first female student in the HVAC program from the local vocational tech high school as part of our co-op student program. She's such a joy. But one day while on the job site, she was pushing a cart and tripped and fell hard on her knees.

The general contractor panicked when he saw her fall, so he called an ambulance and they took her to the hospital. One of my employees—her foreman—told me, "Pauline, she started crying and said, 'Pauline's going to get so mad because I hurt myself on the job!'" She was so worried she was going to lose her job, and she loves working for us.

Poor thing! I was aghast to hear that was her first concern! But that's how much safety is ingrained into our company culture—even the apprentices "get it!" I wrote her a note and told her it was an accident and not to worry.

And that's the beauty of our safety program: because we have one and it's part of our daily culture, we don't have to worry.

## Our Goal: Send Every Worker Home Safe



We take safety pretty seriously around here. And, as a member of Associated Builders and Contractors of Massachusetts, we have access to one of the top safety programs in the country. Established in 1989, ABC's Safety Training Evaluation Process (STEP) serves as a benchmarking and improvement tool for helping PSI achieve the highest level of safety performance. Through this program, we measure our safety processes and policies on 20 key components and we learn to continually enhance our safety programs.

Specifically, we score our level of achievement for each component on a weighted point scale and document our incident rate (TRIR and EMR). As a result, we receive a recognition level of Diamond, Platinum, Gold, Silver, Bronze or Participant based on this data.

We are proud to report that every year since 2003, we have earned a Silver STEP Award or higher. We are proud of our excellence in safety, but even happier that we continue to send our workers home safe every night.



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