



BEING OBSESSIVE ABOUT SAFETY IS NOT A BAD THING

Being obsessed with safety is not the worst thing in the world. The alternative, which include ending up in the ER or losing a lot of money, or worse, are surely no picnic if a bad situation could have been avoided. That said, I am genuinely obsessed with safety, and the idea of “not getting hurt” permeates everything that I do. Seeing potentially harmful things that others don’t even notice is a skill and an art that must be learned and practiced every day. I am in a perpetual mode of thinking about what assets I need to protect and how to go about it to minimize any losses. So, I would like to share with you what goes through my mind in the first couple hours of my day.

Upon waking in the morning, the safety gears immediately start turning. Even getting out of bed requires some critical thought like “gee, how could I get hurt in this situation?” I start out thinking about protecting my most precious asset – my health. Knowing that I’ve got bad knees and I tend to be a bit off-balance the first few minutes after I wake up is something I consider. This is especially true if taking medications that induce drowsiness or if the sleep quality was low. I think about the strain on my neck, due to bad cervical disks, as I lift myself upright and turn to get out of bed. We have hardwood floors in our bedroom, which can be quite slippery if you don’t hit them the right way with your feet. Bare feet can be quite slippery on hardwood floors, especially if the skin is dry and there is low humidity. So, I think about the combination of this whole situation before I make the decision to swing my legs out of bed to put my feet down on the floor. That’s a lot of thought just deciding if it is safe to put my feet down on the floor! Here is the message to remember:

IT’S OK TO BE OBSESSED ABOUT YOUR SAFETY!

I make pack lunches for my daughter, wife, and myself – it is just healthier eating that way. There is much less chance of food borne illness when the food is properly controlled at home, rather than relying on a food vendor or service. Preparing lunches is hazardous! Fruits and other round or irregularly shaped foods are particularly difficult to handle when cutting them up. So, I handle knives with great care, ensuring that I have positioned the fruit precisely and that my fingers are clearly out of the cutting zone. Even to this day it is so tempting to foolishly hold an awkward avocado in my hand while attempting to remove the large pit, but I resist. I am keenly aware of the urge to take a short cut in an attempt to speed up the process. What makes an avocado so hazardous is the fact that it has a hard skin and soft interior flesh, so cutting into it requires a cutting force that anticipates the transition from the skin to the flesh. Somehow I resist the urge to do this and instead put it down on the cutting board to remove the pit. I keep my knives razor sharp, knowing that sharp knives are much safer to use than dull knives because it reduces the need to strain while cutting. I



carefully evaluate how much food is packed in proportion to each family member's nutritional needs so that we don't overeat and gain weight. Food is handled in a manner to minimize being outside of the refrigerator and the coolers are packed with the ice on top of the food, knowing that cold air drops.

Before I leave for work, I kiss my daughter goodbye and she says to me "Be safe, Dad." I am still humbled at how I have rubbed off on her. I guess leading by example does lead to other folks have good attitudes about safety. I head out to the garage to leave for work. Upon opening the garage door I walk around my car to make sure that everything is in order with the car and I scan the street up and down to see if any pedestrians are coming. Our community has many people that walk their dogs early in the morning and they seem to come out exactly as I am backing out of the garage. I don't rely solely on my backup camera and instead purposely look behind me as I am backing out of the garage. Almost predictably a jogger seemingly comes out of nowhere precisely at the time that I am backing out of the garage. Alas, another accident has been avoided and I am sure the jogger appreciates that I looked! I make my way to work watching my speed and purposely avoiding my cell phone so as to not text and drive or be otherwise distracted. Confidence is bolstered knowing that my car is among the safest available in terms of crash survival ratings and accident avoidance technologies. Every bit counts when it comes to avoiding and surviving car accidents.

That's a lot of safety-oriented thinking in just the first hour of my day. This is not to mention being mindful of how I walk so as to avoid falling or tripping around the house, making sure I don't slip in the shower, avoiding getting soap in my eyes or scalded by hot water, and not inadvertently sticking my hand in the garbage disposal. I even think about how not to bump into a table edge or avoiding dropping a sharp utensil on my foot or not catching my pants on a cabinet door. Hopefully this gives you some perspective about what someone obsessed, in a good way, thinks about when going about the business of simply getting up in the morning and starting the day. Accidents unfold very quickly and they usually occur under the most innocent of circumstances. So don't worry about being too obsessed with safety. Doing so has generally allowed me to go through life unscathed by accidents in my home and throughout my life. Of course, there are a few exceptions, because accidents do happen. So go ahead, feel free to be obsessed about your safety at every moment of the day!

- Mark M. Kowaleski