

# *TerranearPMC Safety Share*

## **Week of August 6, 2012 – Being Proactive Is Tough**

According to the movie, Apollo 13, Deke Slayton of NASA had the unpleasant task to tell astronaut Jim Lovell some bad news.

“Jim! We've got a problem!”

The flight surgeon joins in before Jim Lovell can respond. “We just got some blood work back in the lab. Charlie Duke has the measles.”

Jim responds. “So we need a new back-up.”

The doctor is quick to answer. “You've all been exposed to it.”

“Well, I've had the measles,” retorts Jim. But then Deke chimes in; “Ken Mattingly hasn't.”

Jim pleads his case as he realizes that one of his valued crew members, Ken Mattingly, is going to be removed from the mission.

“You wanna break up my crew two days before the launch? When we can predict each other's moves, we can read the tone of each other's voices?!”

The flight surgeon retorts. “Ken Mattingly will be getting seriously ill precisely when you and Haise will be ascending from the lunar surface to rendezvous with him.”

“Jim,” Deke says in a sympathetic voice. “That's a lousy time for a fever!”

“Now. Now look! Jack Swigert has been out of the loop for weeks!”

At this time, the NASA Director speaks. “He's fully qualified to fly this mission.”

Jim Lovell knows that he must maintain himself in front of the Director. “He's a fine pilot! But when was the last time he was in the simulator?!”

The Director answers. “I'm sorry, Jim. I understand how you feel. Now we can do one of two things here. We can either scrub Mattingly, go Swigert. Or we can bump all three of you to a later mission.”

Jim is stunned and turns to Deke. “I've trained for the Fra Mauro highlands... and this is Flight Surgeon horse---, Deke!”

Deke looks seriously at Jim and says, “Jim, if you hold out for Ken, you will not be on Apollo 13. Your decision.”

Of course we all know the rest of the story. Jim Lovell realizes he has a responsibility and as much as he doesn't like the outcome, he knows he must tell a friend and colleague that he has been removed from the mission: a mission that would have taken him to the moon and placed him in the company of a handful of people that could claim that they were somewhere that only the rest of us dream about. Furthermore, as those of us that are familiar with the story, Ken Mattingly stays on Earth and never gets the measles.

So was the doctor wrong? Since we know that Ken doesn't get sick, we all feel bad for him and even develop an animosity for the doctor (who, by the way smokes cigarettes throughout the movie – even in Mission Control! Some health professional!).

The point is, whether Ken Mattingly contracted the measles or not, he was at risk and therefore, once sick, he would have been a detriment to the mission as he would not have been able to perform his assignments – all of which was critical for success and therefore by not being able to perform his tasks, he would have placed the mission and his fellow astronauts in danger. This exemplifies the importance of being proactive; even if nothing unfortunate happens, by taking the necessary precautions, we have assured that the task at hand has been given the best opportunity to succeed. Otherwise, we are left with the dubious obligation of being reactive. Is there really a choice here? Who among us would consciously choose reactivity over pro-activity? Yet, this is the crux of the matter. Reactivity seems to choose us! We don't necessarily want it, yet it takes hold of us. Therefore, by allowing ourselves to be placed in a situation where an unknown (and unwanted) circumstance is thrust upon us, we lose control of our assignments and our goals. This is how work delays occur. This is how people get hurt. Therefore, by being proactive, we are taking control.

How do we achieve being proactive? We must anticipate. What are we anticipating? In our work environment, we need to anticipate potential hazards. Typical workplace hazards can be working near the edge of an excavation or working at an elevated height –both scenarios represent fall hazards. Ergonomic hazards are plentiful as well as pinch points. Also there are health hazards such as loud noise sources and working with toxic materials. Airborne dust, respirable silica and organic solvents and metals fall into this last category. If we can anticipate them, we can institute proper controls. Documents such as integrated work documents (IWDs), activity hazard analyses (AHAs) and Health and Safety Plans (HASPs) are our typical tools that are available for us to be proactive and avoid being reactive. If we do not anticipate hazards, then we are left with the awkwardness (and often ineffective) circumstance of being reactive. When we react, we can create problems both for ourselves and for others.

So once again, was the doctor in Apollo 13 right or wrong? While the movie was made to make his decision (and even him) look foolish, we have to conclude that he was right. Using the same logic, even though we may spend considerable time to develop controls to protect ourselves, and we may not see these controls used or see their effectiveness in a direct way, we have done our job by anticipating potential hazards and being proactive. And if the controls may not be evident to some of our team members, then we have the obligation to help them understand the difference between being proactive versus reactive and to recognize the importance to anticipate. Their life may just depend on it!

***"What you are, is what you have been, what you will be is what you do now."***

The Buddha