

Would You Watch Out For My Safety?

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Encourage Everyone to Watch Out for the Safety of Others

Last year my presentation dealt with the leadership aspects of getting people in the workplace to watch out for each other's safety. This year the focus will be on how you can create an environment that will get a majority of people actively caring and taking action when they see a hazard or unsafe behavior. In the last year I have discovered that the most important factor in increasing the number of people who will participate is the response people get from those they try to help.

Because of this, I will cover in expanded detail the importance of each and every person's response to safety input. As I mentioned last year, everyone has a leadership responsibility when it comes to safety, and it turns out this is true when watching out for the safety of those around you. This paper will cover the basics and the expansion will be discussed in the live presentation in Denver.

Reasons We Should Watch Out for Other Peoples' Safety

You and I do everything we do for a reason, and it is important to understand the "why" of what motivates everyone. One of most important elements left out of motivating people to watch out for others' safety is to help them find their answer to the question, "Why should I watch out for everyone's safety?"

No matter what you do, you have a reason to work safely and watch out for the safety of others. At one of my presentations, a corporate leader made a comment I thought was outstanding. He said, "You know, one of the advantages we have here is we don't have a 1,500 pound steam pipeline going through our building. And do you know one of the disadvantages we have here? We don't have a 1,500 pound steam pipeline going through our building. If we did, we would be more aware of the importance of safety. There would be a perceived risk which would cause us to be more mindful of safety."

What jobs do you think would put you at the highest risk to be injured? Perhaps another way of looking at this is what job would you not want your children to take?

Some of the answers people give are: working on an oil rig, an Alaskan crab fisherman, ironworker, or coal miner. Recently, I was in a coal mine, 1,600 feet underground, learning about

the work my audience was doing every day. As a point of reference, we were down there during the time when the Chilean miners were trapped underground. That type of event increases the perceived danger. Some other jobs perceived to be risky are taxicab driver and convenience store clerk. I can really relate to that. When my daughter went out looking for a job, I told her, "You can take any job you want as long as when you're walking out, there's not one of those stickers on the wall that has a height chart and a video camera taking a picture of the person who just shot at you."

After all the ideas were pointed out, I shared the following information with them. The place in their company where the majority of the injuries occurred was in the office building in which they were working. The people to whom I was talking have more injuries than the people doing the hazardous tasks. For the workers in the hazardous areas, they have a pretty good reason to work safely, right? When they get up in the morning, they go to work at a job where if something went wrong it could kill them. They begin the day and ask themselves, "Should I work safely or die?" That's an easy decision because they don't get a second chance. But the people in the office get up and they think, "Hey, what's the worst thing that could happen to me here? A paper cut? Whoa." Then they walk down the stairs and don't use the handrail, slip and fall and get hurt severely. They begin to pick something up, they hurt their back and for the rest of their life, they are in pain all because they picked up something incorrectly in an office, where it was perceived to be safe.

The same is true for the people doing the hazardous work. They can go through the day totally focused on safety when they are doing the hazardous activities and then they let their guard down. Are you familiar with the Winter Olympics and the snowboarder, Shaun White? He's the guy with the long, red hair. He was on the *Tonight Show*, talking to Jay Leno, and he told a great safety story. He was talking about having focused on snowboarding and now he's getting back into skateboarding. He was in a series of skateboarding competitions and had to miss a couple of them due to an injury. Of course, everyone assumed he got hurt at the skateboard park honing his skills.

He related he was at a skateboard park in Venice Beach, California. He and the other skateboarders were doing crazy stuff. He had a great day and, no, he didn't get hurt then. It was at the end of the day, he said, "As I was leaving the skate park, walking back to my car, I tripped on a curb and twisted my ankle." Shaun was doing something that could potentially kill him if he does it wrong. In his sport, he flies upside down over cement. Even with a helmet on, if you hit right (or wrong) you could break your neck. Now, when he was done with that hazardous situation, he let his guard down resulting in an injury. How ironic was that?

That kind of stuff happens all the time. It tells us we need to watch out for our safety 100 percent of the time - the big stuff and the little stuff. In fact, for the little stuff, we probably need to raise our guard because our mind isn't as focused on the danger.

So, why would people want to watch out for each other's safety? Why would anybody be interested in watching out for somebody else? Why would that be important?

One of the benefits of watching out for other people's safety is that it helps protect you. I teach people during one of my talks, entitled "Ensure Your Safety," each one of us needs to watch out for our own safety. It's all about taking personal responsibility. I picked that up very early in

my career in safety. I listened to a lot of safety professionals say that 90 to 95 percent of the time, when an injury occurred, the person who was injured could have either eliminated the injury, or lessened the effect. I wear a vehicle safety belt and that protects me. I do things safely, I benefit. I'm the one who ultimately suffers the consequence of any injury; therefore, I need to take personal responsibility for my own safety.

When somebody gets hurt, who really pays for the injury? Insurance companies and government agencies? No, the injured person is the one who pays. Businesses write checks, but they don't get injured. They don't deal with the pain. In the case of property damage, it is also true. For example, when you get hit driving your car and it's 100 percent their fault. Who's going to pay for it? They are, but again, who goes through the hassle? You've got to get repair estimates and get it fixed. Even though it gets restored, you're the one who deals with the pain.

I teach people to take personal responsibility. When I started speaking about people's safety over 20 years ago, I started noticing hazards I never would have seen before. My guess is everyone is like that. You spot dangers of which you would never have been aware. You see hazards, and even when you're doing stuff for yourself at home, you think about safety. You're focused on safety, and you're more alert. You're thinking in those terms. So, therefore, you benefit when you watch out for other people. "Hey, I'm going to go to work today and I'm going to watch out for all the hazards of everybody I work with. I'm going to pay attention to them." When you look out for everyone else, you also notice the hazards that could injure you.

As an example, the stage is a part of my work area. One of the things I'm constantly aware of when I bring somebody up on the stage is their safety. I never let them get within one foot of the edge of the stage. Why? Because they're not used to it and they could easily miss the edge and fall off.

The more you watch out for other people, the safer you become and your family's safety improves. How cool is that? You really benefit by watching out for other people.

The second reason to watch out for other people's safety is they may be distracted. It seems there are more distractions today than ever before. Interesting thought. I can think of all sorts of distractions — both internal and external. Since you don't always know what's going on in a person's life, it's very likely you won't know when they are distracted.

For me, the day my mom passed away I am sure I was distracted. I received a call at four in the morning. The doctor said, "You need to come up to the hospital. She's not going to make it through the day."

I got in the car and drove to the hospital. My guess is at four in the morning, heading to the hospital, I might have been a little distracted while driving. I had a wonderful relationship with my parents, yet that morning, I am sure I wasn't a good example of a focused driver. It probably would have helped the other drivers if they knew that information, except you and they don't have the ability to read people's minds.

A third reason to watch out for other people is just plain old brain failure. Not distraction, but your brain actually fails you. The behavioral psychologists will tell you there are certain times

when a human brain will fall short and fail to notice something, called a cognitive failure. I'm sure you have experienced it.

I can tell you how it affected my life. I live in Galt, California, about a half hour south of Sacramento. I was driving about fifty-five miles per hour down a little country road with a yellow line down the middle of the road. As I approached Highway 99, I started slowing down because I was going to turn and get on the freeway. As I slowed down, I saw a truck pull off on the frontage road and come to a stop at the stop sign.

Then I saw him turn and look right at me. I thought, what a great deal. In defensive driving class, they always teach you to actually turn your head and look, don't just glance, don't just look in your rear-view mirror. This guy literally took his whole head, moved it and looked right at me. Then, he turned and looked the other way. I was thinking this is great. He stopped at the stop sign, looked my way and the other way. Life is good.

Suddenly, when I was just a few feet before the intersection, the truck pulled in front of me so fast when I hit him he dragged me 150 feet in his direction. I literally went back later and measured. His truck and my car were totaled. I had to slide out the passenger side of the car. The force with which I hit the safety belt was tremendous. I was shocked. If I hadn't been buckled up, I'd have blown through the windshield, scaring small animals and children. They would have been saying, "Whoa, what was that? An eclipse?" You may laugh, but I wouldn't be here today to make that joke if it weren't for what I did by clicking on my safety belt five minutes earlier as I got into the car.

The reason I tell this story is to let you know what happened to the other driver. There were two things that caused the collision. First, he had what we call a cognitive failure and second, he chose to rush. When the Highway Patrolman showed up, the truck driver said to him, "I looked and he wasn't there."

I replied, "You got it half right. You did look." He had looked right at me. I saw him. The image went from me to his eye, to the optic nerve and it didn't record. That was the cognitive failure.

The safety mistake he made was when he turned and looked the other way. He saw a car coming and he made the assessment, "If I hurry, I can beat that car across the intersection." That was the safety error. If you ever hear your brain say, "Hurry up!" Don't do it. That action destroyed his truck.

What were my choices in that situation? My choices were to swerve left, in which case I still would have hit the truck, because of its length. If I'd swerved to the right, I would have hit a utility pole. Neither was a good choice. The best decision I made that day was to click my safety belt around my shoulder and waist. That permitted me to walk away from that crash, allowing me to give my daughter a hug that afternoon.

Sometimes in life, it doesn't matter who's at fault. The other driver was 100 percent at fault. His insurance company didn't argue at all. Even though I was one hundred percent right, if I had been killed, what consolation would that have been to my wife and daughter standing next to my gravesite saying, "God bless him, Dad was right. But he's dead." There are certain times in life

when you don't get points for being right. Safety's one of them. You can be 100 percent right and dead.

A cognitive failure can happen to anyone. We've all had a cognitive failure. Have you ever looked for something around the house? For example, you can't find your keys. You look all over and you just can't find your keys. So, finally, you give up. You elicit the help of somebody else in your family, "Help, I can't find my keys."

Don't you hate it when they walk in the room, point at the table right in front of you, in plain sight, and there are the keys? We've all had that experience.

I'm sure there are people working with you who are very competent and you're glad they're with you. Yet, if they have a cognitive failure, they could be looking right at a hazard and not see it. At that moment in their life, their safety is dependent upon whether you say something.

You see, sometimes it makes a difference what you do for your own safety, or what you do for someone else's safety. What you do for someone else can make the difference when their brain fails them.

The fourth reason to watch out for others' safety is of benefit to you. This reason is to avoid the personal pain or guilt of realizing you could have done something. I almost had one of those. We were driving to the airport at 4:10 in the morning. My wife, Karen, was in the car with me. It was pitch black outside and I was zipping down the road. As we were driving along, I decided to change the radio station.

All of a sudden, I hear her yell, "Cow!" I look up and at first I don't see a cow. Finally, I see a little white stripe on the top of this very big animal and I swerved to miss it. Karen watched out for our safety and said something. It's a good thing because I was distracted at that moment. If she hadn't said something or if she hadn't been going to the airport with me, I would have hit the cow.

The fifth reason I tell people to be on the watch for each other is that it is the right thing to do. Safety is the right thing to do. Watching out for each other is the right thing to do.

In summary, five of the many reasons we need to watch out for each other's safety are:

1. Watching out for others improves your own safety awareness.
2. People get distracted.
3. People have mental failures.
4. You will never suffer the pain of knowing you could have prevented an injury.
5. It is the right thing to do.

Take Personal Responsibility – Ask Others to Watch Out for Your Safety

Even in the safest companies, hazards and risks can occur. When they do, it is critical you are watching out and ready to do what it takes to protect yourself and others. Following safety procedures and using personal protective equipment are key elements. Also, as mentioned earlier, taking on the task of watching out for the safety of others improves your own safety.

Watching out for the safety of others begins with taking personal responsibility. Begin by making sure all those you work with know you want them to watch out for your safety. Let them know one-on-one, if they see you near a hazard, you always want them to point it out to you. You might want to share with them some of the reasons why it is important, such as being distracted or having a cognitive failure. By asking them to watch out for your safety, you are making it comfortable for them to point out a hazard when they see one near you. Also, by asking others to watch out for your safety, you have set in motion making actively caring for others the cultural norm. Your work site will be safer when more people ask others to watch out for their safety.

Also, remind them if they notice you doing less than the safest behavior, you would appreciate their input and would like them to point it out to you. Every one of us can have a day when we aren't at our best. I have heard numerous stories over my career of people who were known for their great safety performance who let their guard down only once and that was the time they were injured. Let your fellow workers know you want them there for you all the time.

Remember, also, how you respond to them when you ask for their input is going to determine whether or not they believe you really want the input. When someone points something out to you please make it a point to profusely thank them. The more you make them realize you appreciate it, the more likely they will do the same favor for you and others in the future. Once again, it isn't always about you — it can make a difference to the safety of everyone at your operation.

For me, a change in how I wanted input from others started at home not at work. It was not uncommon for my wife and me to be driving together on the freeways of California. When she noticed a hazard such as brake lights ahead she would let me know. I used to respond by telling her I saw them and I knew what I was doing. This wasn't the best way to handle the situation from a safety or a relationship point of view. After a few years in this business, I began to realize how valuable her paying attention was to my safety. I have now changed the way I react to her feedback.

Now, when she points out a hazard such as brake lights ahead, I thank her for letting me know and I would appreciate it if she kept doing so. My ego is still involved so I do let her know when I had also seen them and I let her know I still want her input. Thanking her often increases her awareness and input and it improves our relationship.

One other thought comes to mind. You should ask all the people around you, regardless of their position or title. Whether you're the newest person on the job or the most experienced person, you still need everyone else's input. You could be a part-time employee or the owner of the business. Injuries do not respect or recognize rank or position. Make sure you have asked everyone to watch out for your safety.

How to Share Safety with Others

What a great place you are in. You are motivated and now you have a good enough reason why you would want to watch out for the safety of others. You have already taken the first step of asking others to watch out for your safety and now, you are ready to learn how to share safety with others in a way that is comfortable for you and them.

So, what do you do when you see an unsafe act happening or you see someone near a hazard? What do you say that feels comfortable? I remember several years ago, observing these two ladies in my neighborhood. It was before I started riding a bike, and I noticed them doing something for their fitness that was outstanding. They would walk every single day in the country near where I live and I'd think, "That's pretty good."

But while they were doing this great thing for their health, I noticed they were doing something incredibly unsafe. They were walking down the little country road with a 55-mile an hour speed limit, yellow line down the middle, and they're walking on both sides of the road. Someday, I might be driving down the road and I have trouble with my car, causing me to swerve. In which case, I'm going to hit one of them. I would have had to decide which one would live.

One day, I'm at the end of my driveway and I see them about a hundred yards away walking in my direction. I think to myself, gee, I wonder if I should say something. What will they think? I think to myself that I speak to people like you all the time and tell them why they should care enough to say something, so I'd better do what I teach people. It is important to be congruent and if you stand in front of groups and tell people to talk to others about safety and then you don't do it yourself, that's not going to work. So I thought, "Okay, I'm going to tell them."

I wait until they arrive at my mailbox and I proceed to say, "I see you ladies walking every day. I really admire that and it's great for your health, but I notice you do something that's very risky. You're walking on either side of the street and if someone had to swerve, one of you is going to die."

They responded by saying, "We hadn't thought of that."

I then added, "You might want to walk on the side of the road facing traffic since there is no sidewalk here. Then, if you notice a car coming at you, at the very least, you could jump out of the way. If the driver had to take an emergency action, they could swerve the other way to avoid hitting either one of you."

They thanked me for pointing that idea out to them. They made a big deal of praising me for what I did. They said, "We really appreciate it. We saw you standing there and were wondering what you were waiting for. Not many people would take the time or care enough to do that. Thank you for doing that, and thank you for caring."

The reason I'm telling you about all the praise they gave and how much they appreciated me is not to tell you what a great guy I am. I tell you because of what happened next. I got in my car, and I started to drive away. The first thought that popped into my head as I make the turn was, "I wonder if they think I'm a jerk." Where did that come from? They just told me how much they appreciated my intervention.

I can tell you where that thought came from. It was the result of my asking the wrong question. Remember, while I was standing at the mailbox, the question I asked myself was, “What will they think?” Your brain is an amazing computer and it is capable of doing some amazing stuff. The speed at which it works is incredible. Long before computers could do multiple tasks at the same time, the human brain was created to do just that.

When I stood there by the mailbox and saw them coming, I asked a question that put my mind into search mode. I was searching for all the possible things the ladies might have thought. I had asked myself the wrong question. Instead of random speculation in my own mind, I would have been better off asking them what they wanted me to do. Your brain will give you the answers to the questions you ask. Therefore, it is really important to focus on asking the right questions.

I asked the question, “What will they think?” There are a lot of possible answers to that question. It turns out the first one that popped into my consciousness was, “Do they think I’m a jerk?” That answer will make anyone feel bad. It fascinates me that even with their positive response, my mind thinking of this possible answer let me feel discouraged.

A couple of weeks later, in Rock Springs, Wyoming, I was doing a presentation in a college lecture hall. I had a man up on stage and I noticed his shoelace was untied. When the trick was finished, he needed to go up the stairs to return to his seat. If he stepped on his shoelace going up the stairs, he would trip and fall, hurting himself. You have heard you should correct people in private. I didn’t have that option. At that moment, I thought of what to say. I turned to him and said, “Would you like me to watch out for your safety?”

He said, “What?”

I again said, “Would you like me to watch out for your safety?”

He said, “Sure.” I then told him about his loose shoelace. When you ask that question, people are going to wonder what you are referring to and will probably start looking around. They know you’ve got something in mind and are naturally curious, which is why this question will almost always result in a “yes” answer.

Significantly, nothing negative popped in my head. Why? This time I asked a better question. Instead of asking myself, “What will he think?” I asked him, “Do you want me to watch out for your safety?” He answered and I did not have to speculate. I knew what he wanted because he told me.

Afterwards, somebody asked me what would you have done if he had said no? Simple. I can always use a new safety story. I’d have stepped on his shoelace and tripped him. Well, it would have been safer to fall on the flat stage, don’t you think?

Just kidding, but seriously, I asked the man a question. Would you like me to watch out for your safety? What if somebody says no? As rare as that is, I probably would have told him anyway, but I have to tell you a no answer to that question would be unlikely.

So, what if someone does respond negatively? How can you handle that in an effective way? I was speaking at ExxonMobil and a lady came up to me afterwards and said, “What do you do if

somebody does say something negative?" She said her neighbor is always mowing the lawn without wearing shoes. She really wants to say something to them but was concerned as to how they would react. Once again, the best approach is to simply ask, "Would you like me to watch out for your safety?" But, what if they did react negatively? I find a good way to deal with this issue is to think ahead of time what you would say.

What if somebody says, "Hey, would you get out of here? I need to get this job finished. What do you think I am, stupid?"

What if they did this? What would I do? I'll tell you the strategy I've developed that works for me. What I do is think to myself, that person is probably having a bad day. It's not about me; it's about them at that moment. I am willing to be forgiving and if I have thought about this reaction ahead of time, I am less likely to be caught off guard. After all, I know there are days when I've had a bad day. I mean, we've all had days when everything seems to go wrong.

Think of a time when things weren't going right for you. Things are not working the way you want in the world. Have you ever gotten off the phone with somebody and it was not the phone call you wanted to have — things are going badly, you're irritated, and you're angry? Then some person you care about walks in the room and they innocently say, "Hi." You bark at them. It wasn't them, was it? It was the state you were in and you were having a bad moment.

If I point out to somebody, "Hey, would you like me to watch out for your safety here?" and they bark at me, I think, wow, maybe they're having a bad day. I can cut them some slack. I'm not perfect. I have moments when I'm not my best. That's okay. I'll let them yell at me. By the way, it's okay anyway. I know they're not going to get hurt because I said something. I did something to make a difference. If they choose not to pay attention to it, that's a choice they're making. I know for myself, I've done all I can do.

I set that up in my mind ahead of time in case it happens. By the way, it doesn't happen all that often. It really doesn't. Once again, if you ask them the right way, "Hey, would you like me to watch out for your safety?" most of the time, people appreciate your advice. They are almost certain to say 'yes' because they are at the very least curious. So, most of the time they're going to say "yes," at which point you tell them. You're not going to feel bad about it because they're going to be okay with your help. So ask the question. Instead of saying, "What will they think," I say, "Do you want me to watch out for your safety?" and when they say, yes, I have permission to actively care.

On the lighter side, there is something else you could do if somebody does bark back at you. Ask them to hold on for a moment while you go get your video camera. Let them know you want to put it on YouTube with all the other funny safety videos.

It is good to have more than one way to get something done. That is true in communicating safety.

Another way to share safety with someone is to use the simple phrase, "As you know..." For example, "As you know, there's a hazard there." Or, "As you know, you need someone to help you lift something like that."

Maybe you're working with somebody who is an experienced worker, somebody who knows their job. This technique is great in that kind of situation. I have the privilege of speaking to a lot of very skilled workers. I spoke to the Labor Division of the National Safety Council at their national meeting. The people in this audience are skilled craftspeople and experts at their jobs. Before the meeting, I was talking with a friend who is dedicated to safety and has been a shop steward in the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers for years. We were discussing how even the most qualified person can have a bad day. This phrase, "As you know..." is especially useful when you are dealing with someone whom you respect and you want to make sure they aren't injured. The statement itself acknowledges their expertise and assumes they already knew of the hazard or the correct way to accomplish the task.

This gives the person being protected a graceful response. For example, maybe someone saw me lifting a table that was a little too heavy for one person to lift. They could walk over and say, "John, as you know, you need someone to help you lift that table." I could easily respond, "I knew that. I was just coming to get you." Both of us could pretend I knew what I was doing whether I did or not.

So, when I'm doing something and you care enough to say to me, "John, as you know, there's a hazard there." I need to think, "Hey, that person cares about me." I can say, "Thanks for watching out for me."

There are times when you need to intervene very quickly. That happened during a break when I was doing a seminar. I was standing at the front of the room, near the center aisle, when two hotel employees were calling out for us to get out of the way. They were moving the coffee service table to the back of the room. I didn't realize that, so I actually stepped right into their path. Then I realized what they were doing and saw more people in the aisle they could collide with because they were moving so quickly.

I raised my hand and said, "Stop, please set the table down." Then I said, "Let me help you out. Where are you moving this table?" They told me and then I announced to the room we needed the aisle clear and they would be coming through to the back of the room. I thanked them for stopping and said I just didn't want to see them or anyone else get injured. They thanked me and on they went. Sometimes, you have to act quickly and you can add the helpful language after the fact.

How to Respond When Someone Watches Out for Your Safety

When you want to improve your safety culture, teaching people how to respond when someone watches out for them is critically important. I got an outstanding view of this when I was performing a trick where a dollar bill from an audience member is destroyed and then ends up restored inside a lemon. To finish this trick, I borrow a knife from someone in the audience and cut the lemon in half. One day, after doing this trick, a gentleman walked up to me afterwards and said, "John would you like me to watch out for your safety?" I said, "Sure." He then said, "When you cut the lemon in half it would be much safer if you had gloves on. Would you like a pair of leather gloves that are Kevlar-lined?" I said, "That would be great." He went and got me a pair and I started using them during my next presentation. I was now safer because he watched out for my safety and I thanked him for that.

A couple weeks later, I was doing the same trick and another gentleman came up to me afterwards and said, "John would you like me to watch out for your safety?" I said, "You bet." He said, "I noticed when you are cutting the lemon you wore leather gloves and those are good. We have gloves that are Kevlar and are more cut-resistant than leather. You could cut through the leather with a sharp knife."

At that point, he's watching out for my safety and protecting me. How I respond to his concern goes beyond protecting just me. It can impact other people this gentleman observes in the future. How I respond has everything to do with whether he will choose to help others in the future. Remember, the gentleman was telling me about the Kevlar cut-resistant gloves and recall also that the leather gloves I was using were Kevlar-lined. No one knew that except me. I could have said to him, "Oh, hey, don't sweat it, these have a Kevlar lining."

What effect would that response have on the second gentleman in our story? One possibility is he might have felt I was putting him down because he didn't know. He might have felt foolish he didn't realize I would have had the best gloves. He was trying to help me so it was important for me to let him do so. Otherwise, he could have walked away thinking he shouldn't have said anything. I would have made him feel uncomfortable about watching out for other people's safety. If I made him feel uncomfortable, he might choose not to help the next person he sees doing something more hazardous. His internal dialogue might be, "Should I say something? No, I got beaten up the last time I tried to help." He fails to say anything and someone gets injured.

Once the hazard's been pointed out to me, how I respond is not about me; it's about the next person. So, I said to him, "Hey, that's great." He went to get me a pair and they are the ones I use now. To this day, he believes he helped me out and he did. So did the other guy. The secret to the interaction I had with the second person is I didn't steal his moment of helping from him. That moment is about him and the next person he's going to help.

Whenever somebody points out safety to you, please do whatever you can to make it a big deal. Say, "Thanks very much, I really appreciate that. Thank you for actively caring!" This response will generate the continued behavior of watching out for others' safety.