

It Was Only About Language, Not a Profession

I appreciate the passion in Mr. Smith's commentary on my article about "root cause" (July 2002), but I'm disappointed my presentation was viewed so negatively. My intention was not to denigrate the safety profession – an occupation I have supported enthusiastically for more than 30 years. Rather, I had hoped to convince readers that certain language used by some safety pros is not only invalid, but can inhibit a comprehensive analysis of the various factors that could have contributed to a workplace injury.

From numerous visits to "the trenches," I have learned that many line workers view the search for a *root cause* as a "fault-finding" expedition to find one person to blame. This can stifle the type of interpersonal dialogue needed to identify the contributing factors to an *accident* and develop an effective corrective action plan.

Perhaps most disturbing to some readers of my *root cause* article was my claim that if a *root cause* does exist (which I doubt), it cannot be found with the tools commonly used to *investigate* an *accident*. There can be no argument here. The cause of an event cannot be determined through surveys, interpersonal discussion, and correlational analysis. So why use language that is invalid and has some unfortunate connotations?

That was the main point of my July contribution to *ISHN*. I hope most readers did not view it as "academic" nor "dispassionate." My passion throughout a 33-year career has been to make a beneficial difference through teaching. Thus, I am disheartened when I fail to the degree shown in Mr. Smith's reactions. I sincerely apologize for any

misunderstanding, and appreciate this opportunity to clarify my perspective and improve my ability to teach.

One more thing. Please examine the italicized words in this commentary and consider carefully – Do they encourage or discourage participation?

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