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Workers' Comp and The Colombian Drug Cartel

I recently returned from a trip to Colombia that I will never forget. I had an opportunity to work alongside the National Police to help and observe how they have been able to cut crime and drug use in that country by over 50%.

Most people don't know that cruise ships and land developers are back to Colombia at places like the beautiful ancient city port of Cartagena because it is once again a safe city.

The capable leaders of Colombia discovered that no matter how hard they fought the existing drug kingpins, true victory lied with preventing today's youth from becoming tomorrow's bad guys. What has been accomplished with regards to reducing crime in Colombia over the last five years is a model now being followed by other countries throughout South and Central America.



For years drug cartels terrorized a whole country and drove its population into fear and apathy. When the name "Colombia" was spoken in the past, most people thought of cocaine, extortion and murder. Police and the military fought them diligently with relentless force. Military helicopter pilots burned crops and liberated modern style concentration camps but had little overall impact on their society's scourge.

After losing many pilots to violent deaths and being close to losing hope, their tough-minded leaders knew they had to do more.

As I was told, a drug cartel's "recruiter" was captured one day. Under interrogation, he was asked how it was so easy for them to enlist young Colombians to commit to their lifestyle of crime. The recruiter, with disdain, said, "People are stupid! They will believe anything we tell them, even that their own government is evil." That bit of intel spawned a new approach to combat the drug wars in Colombia.

Not only would they continue to use military force against the cartels, but would concurrently launch a nation-wide "Values and Morals Program" to educate children and families across Colombia.

National Police were trained on how to implement programs based on a universal "code of happy living" to teachers, children and parents.

If I did not witness it with my own eyes I wouldn't have believed it! As a group of concerned business people, we were driven in a police bus to the middle of downtown Cartagena. We were given booklets with 24 simple rules for happy living called The Way to Happiness (translated into Spanish).

We stood side by side with the National Police as children, couples, parents, cab drivers, etc., approached to request these booklets.

This far reaching program, with the police being seen as caring for their citizens, children especially, has helped topple an entire illegal drug industry. One telling moment was when a child, no more than nine years old asked for and received a twenty pound box of these booklets to bring home to her family and friends. It was a profound site seeing this tiny little person lugging home her box of "hope."

I have never seen more prideful police. They knew that while bad guys were being thwarted with guns and helicopters, they were concurrently helping to proof the next generation from becoming tomorrow's cartel members.

Okay, what does this have to do with workers' comp in the U.S.? Does your company spend too much time and money on workers' comp claims? Is your company working extremely hard on lowering workers' comp by "attacking" the existing claims? The answer to those questions might be "yes." Are you also preventing the next generation of claims? If you are still unhappy with your workers' comp costs, you aren't yet effectively stopping tomorrow's claim! It is that simple.

Workers' comp in this country is a maddening microcosm of reactionary management. It is a system of coping (grappling with an unwanted condition) with today's problems while doing little to prevent tomorrow's. Coping, as the standard management procedure, is highly stressful and will eventually lower the morale of all those in that environment. NOTE: winning improves morale. When losing continues for too long, one falls into apathy; "There's nothing I can do about it!" And this is a cancer to any group, organization, department or individual.

I have no idea how the workers' comp system, as it exists today, has been allowed to continue for so long. The only reasons I can think of is either there is little hope that claims can be prevented or companies are so profitable they can afford to waste money on expensive claims.

Assuming the latter is no longer the case, the good news is sprain/strain claims are now preventable. Injuries, especially back, shoulder and wrist injuries are now easy to prevent and by doing so can create windfall type profits.

What CFO wouldn't love to have an inspired manager walk into their office with a plan that would net the organization hundreds of thousands, if not millions of dollars in new-found profits? And don't forget to add your sizeable bonus based on dollars shaved from workers' comp costs!

In Colombia, by combining reactionary (guns and helicopters) and proactive strategies (preventing tomorrow's generation of criminals), they reduced drug use and crime by over 50%! Compared to that, I assure you, preventing some back injuries is a piece of cake!

F.I.T. has over 1,000 Injury prevention specialists throughout the U.S. and Canada to help you. Or, if you prefer, we will train your own people on how to use our breakthrough training methodology for changing employees' physical behavior in the workplace.

It is a fact that the worst thing you can ever do is NOTHING and when it comes to preventing claims, that's been the modus operandi for far too long.

"Prevent tomorrow's injuries today." Big bonuses are very good for your morale!

Dennis Downing, President
Future Industrial Technologies

Check out our new blog: www.backsafe.wordpress.com. Any injury prevention/safety type topics you'd like to see covered there? Please let us know. We love suggestions and feedback.

We look forward to helping you to "Prevent Tomorrow's Injuries Today," right now!

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This article may be reprinted in its entirety provided that the following resource is left intact:

Dennis Downing is the founder and President of Future Industrial Technologies, Inc., a nationwide Industrial Injury Prevention Training Company. It specializes in improving conditions at work and in life by utilizing the proprietary injury prevention programs, BACKSAFE® and SITTINGSAFE®, that have proven to be highly successful at reducing workers comp costs within companies of all sizes and descriptions.

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