

# THINK SMALL TO GO BIG

By Collin Pullar, President, Saskatchewan Construction Safety Association

Often when we think of innovation, we think of incredible and unique "ah-ha" inventions no one has ever thought of that change the world. In practice; however, this is not how innovation typically works. Even revolutionary ideas are not necessarily instances of lightning that suddenly appear in a bottle. Most innovations are small, and often unnoticed, changes to previously well-established ideas, practices, or products. More often, they are the result of combining and applying existing ideas for the simple goal of making things a little better.

As ideas are integrated, a new product comes forward. Some are winners that others carry on, but the majority are failures, some of which have tragic results. In either case, there are learnings that can be built on.

The fascinating documentary series called *How We Got to Now*, with host Steve Johnson, reveals the stories behind amazing ideas that we benefit from in our modern lives. More importantly, it takes an idea through history and shows the unsung heroes who, at the time, were unaware of how their ideas would shape the future. These are the ones whose ideas formed the foundation for the next set of innovations.

When asked about innovations in the world of safety, people are typically waiting, with bated breath, to hear about the latest safety app, virtual reality experience, digital hearing protection device - the next technological breakthrough that will make all of their safety problems go away. The latest and greatest tool will certainly be important in people's lives; however, the greatest innovations in safety have simply been a

result of making those small, unnoticed changes with regard to approaches in how employers and workers do their work, recognize hazards, and take steps to mitigate risks. These are the noteworthy ideas that will have the greatest impact and benefits in the long-term, all for the shared purpose of trying to make things a bit better each day.

All we have to do is look back over the last 20 years in the Saskatchewan construction industry to see the massive effect of small, but continuous, changes to the industry. Some of the change can be attributed to a combination of greater education, changing attitudes, and the use of technology. I often emphasize the difference in more than \$200 million a year in Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) premiums that is being realized, year over year, because of the small innovations of business. For most companies, the innovation took the shape of recognizing that their businesses would yield long-term performance improvements if they embraced and applied some safety leadership principals. As a result, they found their own breakthroughs in terms of costs, turnover, and reputation.

The benefits of integrating safety in general business management practices are now well known and the future of safety is what we need to focus on. While progress has been amazing, there are still hurdles to overcome. Workplace deaths and injuries are still far too high, and the next breakthroughs are going to require a continued commitment to creativity and discipline. Much like other innovations, collaboration with other like-minded individuals, businesses, and government entities, may be necessary to make transformations to the Saskatchewan workplace.

When strategizing to advance any aspect of your business, remember that innovation is far more basic than an invention or breakthrough. Look at innovation as a state of mind, an attitude that continually seeks opportunities to improve the current state of operations. It is an approach that learns from previous errors, mistakes, and losses, and builds on known successes in our industry. Think small to capture the big, long-term goals you have. The next great innovation in the industry may very well be the result of a modest change over time, brought to the industry by your business for all to see, embrace, and build upon. 📱

