



Safe Work and Return to Work Awards 2019

Shane Webcke *Safety Ambassador*

Safe Work and Return to Work Awards example entry Category eight – Injured Worker Achievement Award

1. Describe your injury.

A simple slip caused a disc to dislodge in my spine, something my day was definitely not expecting. This led to my inability to walk, sit, bend – pretty well move at all.

The pain level reached severe, to the point that I received a CT-led injection into my spine to numb the lower region of my back as well as prevent spasm attacks in my legs. This injection assisted initially in rehabilitation through hydro therapy treatments.

Due to the type of injury and severe level of pain, rehabilitation was very much restricted to hydro treatments as my body could not withstand weight training and/or physiotherapy. This type of injury will never lead to a full recovery, without major and risky surgery. Subsequently, my level of control to ensure I do not aggravate the injury is imperative.

After several months of hydrotherapy treatment, I was able to increase my rehabilitation to include some light weights training and occasional physiotherapy.

2. How did your injury impact you?

I started with Northside Trusses & Frames back in 2001, my first position after leaving the Australian Army. I commenced in a labouring position and after a couple of years moved into a forklift position managing the incoming/outgoing trusses and deliveries.

Knowing that I have an injury that I will never 100 per cent recover from is stressful and obviously disheartening and my normal positive mannerisms were upset for a period of time, especially when the injury first presented itself with the associated physical pain.

A father of four including a 12 year old son keen to throw the ball in the afternoon as well as a 2 and 3 year old who wanted nothing more than to give daddy cuddles, the injury impacted my life more than anybody could appreciate. Trying to explain to a 2 and 3 year old that daddy can't pick them up or bend over to give them cuddles was simply impossible and having to pass off ball throwing duties to family and friends was something that really broke my heart.

In addition to not being able to be the father my children knew, in addition to putting the extra household duties on my full-time working wife, the injury and rehabilitation impacted us financially as I was unable to contribute by completing weekly overtime, an amount which over the financial year changes my annual income significantly. This meant a complete rework of our household budget, and cancelling plans we had for 2014 including our first family holiday.

My wife has felt the strain of having a husband who cannot do simple tasks such as push the shopping cart, help the kids put their shoes on or take them to the park for the afternoon. This has caused stress on our relationship at times due to my frustrations in not being able to, and her frustrations in knowing that I want to help but cannot.

Not only has it caused frustrations at home, in my working life I have felt resentment from my co-workers due to my requirement to be on light-duties. Work colleagues of years have resorted to not speaking with me and can't understand that I am doing everything physically possible to get myself back in action.

3. Describe your return to work.

As a way of dealing with these frustrations and the frustrations of others, I approached my employer about finding a position where I could contribute entirely to the company (as opposed to light duties where I couldn't complete any job entirely). After much consideration and some hesitation, I asked them to consider me in a position as an 'assessor'.

This was a major step as this required me to undertake study in addition to facing my fear of computer literacy. Having barely touched a computer in the past, I knew I would face embarrassment and challenges in suggesting this option, however knew that it was the best thing for me, the company and my future.

My training to become an Assessor has officially started and through hard work and dedication, I will be successful in this position. I consider the position part of my rehabilitation, both physically and mentally as I am able to physically fulfil this position and mentally, I am confident and positive about this direction.

Even though my injuries were severe, I never took any time off work. I was always well enough to contribute at some level at work without jeopardising my rehabilitation. It required me to undertake morning and afternoon hydrotherapy sessions in addition to regular surgeon appointments.

After several months I was able to increase my rehabilitation sessions to include light weights training and some (very few) physiotherapy sessions. In addition to this, I undertake a regular gym routine focusing on core strength to assist in supporting my spine to assist in the rehabilitation process. As I will never 100 per cent recover from this injury, my rehabilitation is ongoing.

During this process, the biggest barrier was my inability to push myself too hard, for the threat of aggravating the injury. My biggest barrier was the constant need to focus on control and understanding my limits. Through concentrated effort, and practice and error, I learnt what my limitations were and how to use posture and manoeuvring to undertake some previously unachievable daily tasks.

4. What do you believe the benefits of returning to work are?

When I was initially injured I could have turned around and spent weeks recovering on the lounge at home. This would have no doubt led to me being more distressed with the situation.

Sticking to it and contributing and proving that even though I had this injury I was capable, I believe set a precedent for other workers within the company that even with the worst of injuries, you can still, to some degree, contribute. I believe my determination to continue to contribute has placed me as a role model for other workers within the company.

Through dedication to my rehabilitation schedule, I can now move far more freely, I can participate in some regular day-to-day activities at home and I am comfortable with moving forward in this new position.

The advice I would give to other people who experience a similar injury is that anything is achievable providing you are determined and do everything you can to help your recovery. Rehabilitation is key to the future and regardless where you end up, providing you stick to it and give it all you've got, you will prove to yourself that you are capable of anything.

There is nothing more uplifting then kissing my kids goodbye in the morning and heading off to earn my way and contribute towards their lives and I can do this due to my commitment to my rehabilitation and my decision to give it a go.