



I have spent my entire adult life working in the Electric Transmission and Distribution Industry. I am truly blessed to have been given an opportunity that most people can only fully appreciate in retrospect. As a knuckle-headed teenager, I had no sense of direction or purpose. It wasn't until my uncle, realizing that I was standing at a fork in the road of life, did something that would change my life forever – he hired me. He was a foreman on a line-clearance tree crew and one thing that he knew for sure is that tree work would either make or break me. Honestly, I think he was convinced that it would break me. After all, I was a young punk with a big mouth and very little life experience. Turns out, he was right. The early morning hours, the job site reporting, the exposure to the elements rain or shine, the experienced veterans on the crew who had no time for my nonsense, and relentless cutting and dragging of brush destroyed me, the old me. During the first few months I started to learn technique, how to be part of a crew, how to communicate, how to take direction, and most importantly that my success was tied to my effort. Frankly, I came out on the other side, a different person. I was becoming a skilled trade professional, and I liked it. In fact, I liked it so much that I quickly rose to the ranks of “top man” and was positioned for running my own crew one day.

After several years of development and commitment to the trade, I had an opportunity to join the local utility. On the tree crew, we would talk about what it would be like to be a lineman. You see, tree trimmers and linemen tend to cross paths a lot. Every time a storm would blow through, trees and powerlines would come down, often at the same time and place. This gave us tree trimmers a chance to watch the linemen work and talk to them about their careers. Let's just say the linemen brought home a lot more money than we did. I couldn't believe at the time how lucky I was to have been hired by the power company. Although I couldn't fully appreciate how fortunate I was, I did recognize it as a pivotal moment in my life. By now, I was married, had kids, and was working on buying my first house. In just a few years, I was a lineman, had just purchased my first home, was driving a fancy new truck, and my wife was able to stay home with our kids. I worked hard, took jobs that no one else wanted to do, and never turned down a complicated or high-risk assignment. In many ways, I was riding the high of my success. I was routinely asked to be part of a crew working nighttime or weekend outages, crew leaders at my service center would ask to have me assigned to their truck, and supervisors and managers would recognize me as one of the leading linemen in the service area. However, I didn't think too much about safety. I would take chances, cut corners when no one was looking, and make fun of safety initiatives, thinking they were corny. I was too cool, I was too good, I was a fool.

By the early 2000's I was working as a troubleman, a single operator who responded to outages, emergencies, and/or switching assignments. I was pretty good at running trouble and working with the control room to keep outage times small. I really liked the fact that there was always something different going on. What I didn't like was the shift work. A midnight shift would make me feel like a zombie and I rarely saw my family. The only good thing about a midnight shift was that when it was over, there was a four-day weekend before you went back to dayshift. It was during one of these transitions that I was faced with another significant moment that changed everything. You see, troublemen are often scheduled and assigned to trucks so they can be shared. The efficiencies are obvious, but it did mean that occasionally you would have to wait for the previous shift to return before you could load up on your truck. One day, as I was



reporting for my first day of dayshift, I noticed my truck was not available. Thinking that my truck partner was still out working, I decided to call him and see when he would be returning. Worst case, I would load up on a spare. My call went straight to voicemail. It wasn't until I entered the service center that I learned my truck partner had been working inside a self-contained modular substation when he contacted an energized section of 34kV bus work. It was my first experience with a workplace fatality and even worse, someone I knew. It took a long time for things to get back to what felt normal. I was changed forever and now my view on what it was to be a "professional" shifted. I started to appreciate methodical and well planned work more. I started to think my tasks through from start to finish before I undertook them. I started to think about how my words and actions could influence others. I realized that safety, quality, and productivity were all tied to the same traits. The traits of a professional.

In the years that followed I continued to take on assignments that no one else was interested in. I continued to want to be part of complicated, high-risk activities but now for another reason. Now I wanted to make sure that this work was performed as professionally as possible. No injuries, no rework, delivered on time, never compromising safety. We all have forks in the road and if we are lucky, we have people in our lives who expect more from us, to be professionals, but unfortunately, we will also have experiences that we wish we didn't. These experiences leave us with an appreciation for what it truly means to be a professional.

The diversity of our experiences and people we meet make us who we are today. Make sure you maintain a continuous improvement mindset and recognize that you are on a journey. Make sure the destination is one that moves yourself and the trade forward and never underestimate the positive changes that can occur in people you have influence with, most importantly, yourself.

Thank you,

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