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Horseplay

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The fellow who always wants to be the center of attraction or who thinks that he has to be the “life of the party”, whether he is at play or work, is the person who usually likes to engage in horseplay. There is always a possibility of horseplay at work, even in a small group.

We have come a long way over the years – I think that there is less tendency to engage in horseplay today than there was many years ago. No doubt you’ve heard of the simple little jokes that were usually pulled on new employees, such as sending them to the tool room for a left-handed monkey wrench or even a sky hook.

This type of practical joke soon became too mild in nature and the practical jokers thought up much rougher tricks, which were serious job hazards because they resulted in many injuries, even deaths. I suppose that they wouldn’t have come up with so many unusual stunts if they hadn’t had an audience, which usually encourages a practical joker.

The worst stunts were pulled on the young or inexperienced worker. The simple little capers intended to show up a green worker were just starters – the ‘jokes’ soon got much worse. The new worker is naturally green about his new duties – you remember your first day on the job, just as I do. That’s the time when a fellow needs a friend.

Do you remember your first day at school? Your surroundings were all quite new – you had been thrust into a whole new world with a teacher that you never saw before. However, there were 20 or 30 other kids in your class and they were all in the same boat, weren’t they? What would have happened if some smart aleck kid tripped you on the stairs? You wouldn’t have liked it, and it might have changed your whole outlook on school. You certainly wouldn’t have wanted to go back the second day.

So, if any of us have even the slightest feeling or urge to “pour it on” the new worker, I want to know about it. The simplest gag or foolish errand can take all of the “steam” out of our training program for new workers. It is exactly the type of thing that we can’t afford to do.

Horseplay is defined in the dictionary as rough or boisterous play. I’ve seen it develop into much more than just “play” – it can easily get out of hand! In addition to the usual possibility of serious injury to the worker, the horseplay will also interfere with production. We don’t want employees to suffer injury, nor do we want production to suffer.

Some of the following would be classed as horseplay on the job. As you hear them, try to think of the serious things that could happen as a result: tickling the operator in the ribs while he is busy on a machine; giving a fellow worker a hot-foot; pouring itching powder on a guy’s towel; greasing steps or a ramp; shoving or pushing someone; tripping a guy; turning off the cold water on a fellow in the shower which leaves only scalding hot water running; throwing tools or other objects; wrestling or scuffling; or teasing or fooling other workers.

I almost forgot a gag that used to be very popular – pulling a bench or stool out from under someone as he was about to sit down. It mattered little whether it was Bill, Tom or Harry that sat down on the floor – the simple fact is that you can cause painful or serious injury just for the sake of a laugh from the others. The chances are too big to take.

Remember, too, that a blast of air can cause a person to be blinded or to have his eardrum ruptured. If you direct a blast of air just to hear it scare someone, you may throw debris or metal scrap into an employee’s eyes.

I hope that you’ll help me be on the lookout for practical jokers. Probably the biggest favor you could do in this matter would be to report any horse-play. Above all else, don’t encourage anyone by laughing at these gags which often cause serious injuries.

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