

I saw the accident before it happened!

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Several years ago Fine Woodworking Magazine did a study on safety in the workshop, interviewing people who had lived through a workshop accident and discovered that most people reported that they saw it happen just before it happened. How many times have you heard this or experienced it yourself?

Of course there are accidents where something comes out of the blue and there is no way you could have avoided it, but I am willing to bet that is actually quite rare. Statistically we know this because when worksite safety programs are put into action, accident rates drop. Prevention programs do several things: they make us aware of potential accidents and they often put equipment in place, like safety lines, guards and safety glasses, which protect us from all too well known accidents.

In my experience there is another most important factor that makes the difference between an accident and no accident. When we get that feeling or vision that what we are doing is dangerous or could become dangerous we always have the choice of pushing forward, or stopping and taking corrective action BEFORE the accident happens. All too often we say to ourselves that we are almost done, just a few seconds more, a few inches more, just reach out a little bit further, I've gotten away with this 100 times before. When you get into the habit of encouraging your mind and your instincts to speak to you about work hazards, and teaching yourself to react immediately to take that corrective action, the accident just doesn't happen. You change the script, change the film. When you look back on those moments it is surprising to realize that it only took seconds or minutes to change the course of your own personal history: move the ladder over, pick up a push stick for the saw, put on those glasses, move our hand or foot out of the way. As a bonus we actually become more aware of what we are doing and as a result enjoy our work more.

When you see an accident about to happen, stop and change the script. You will like the story much better!

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