



I started off last week's newsletter with a Keats quote: "the centre will not hold." While I was talking about weather phenomena, it was eerily prescient concerning the horrible news we received from Denver this week—the slaughter of 12 innocent people, the wounding of another 58. Words cannot describe our emotions at hearing this kind of news—it just can't make any sense to any normal human being that such a tragedy is possible. It is bleak, stark, indescribable, gut-wrenching. I thought Mitt Romney captured my sentiment: "Each one of us will hold our kids a little closer, linger a bit longer with a colleague or a neighbor, reach out to a family member or friend. We'll all spend a little less time thinking about the worries of our day and more time wondering about how to help those who are in need of compassion most."

And we'll also ask why? Why did this happen? What could we have done? Why didn't the emergency alarm sound on the exit (was there one)? Were there warning signs? This is so senseless and so unpredictable that it would rarely enter into our periscope of risk. Risk is about what we don't know, can't control. But we can usually assess risk, anticipate it and hopefully, manage it.

I couldn't imagine this risk.

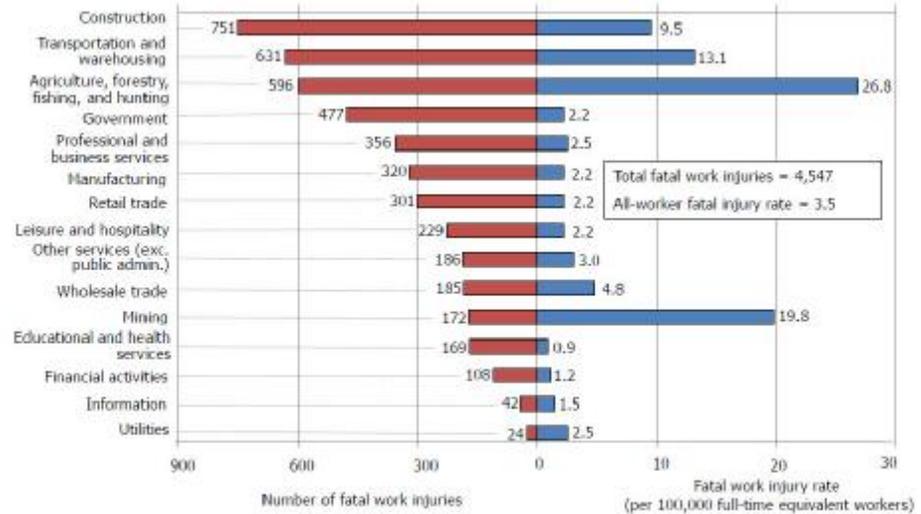
Many of us will pray, and look somewhere else for answers. We might say "things happen for a reason." Maybe they do—in our community, things do happen for reasons and we spend a lot of time trying to figure out what those reasons are/were. But "things happen for a reason" can be very dismissive. It can be the end of the inquiry instead of the beginning. And it does not invite us to accept what happens. It should, in fact, motivate us to action.

So what can we do? While we can hardly start to understand what we need to do to avoid a tragedy like the Colorado massacre, we have quiet tragedies on our jobs and in our community every day, every month. In 2010, 751 people were killed in construction related accidents. That's almost 63 per month, almost 15 people every week. This is a tragedy that hits our community every day. We rightly celebrate that these numbers are down from previous years—down from the 834 deaths in 2009 and down from 1,239 in 2006. But we still have to meet the widows and the children and the colleagues of our own lost folks too many times every year. Bureau of Labor statistics rates construction as the fourth most dangerous industry but notes that we account for the most fatal injuries every year:



According to the chart, 9.5 workers out of every 100,000 full time equivalents will suffer a fatal accident. While we're doing better, we're not doing well enough. It is something we can address. For instance, there were 260 deaths caused by falls in 2010, down substantially from 447 in 2007. Once again, good progress, but not good enough. Falls should be completely preventable through tie-offs, safety fences and other proactive measures. We need to make the commitment to prevent those tragedies we can. Safety has to be as important to us as the walls and the floor decks and the pieces of the project that make it whole. Our partners at AGC have performed great service in making safety programs available including hosting an entire conference every year that focuses on just health and safety. Safety has to be the affirmative obligation and commitment of every worker on the job.

Chart 2. Number and rate of fatal occupational injuries, by industry sector, 2010\*



\*Data for 2010 are preliminary.  
 NOTE: All industries shown are private with the exception of government, which includes fatalities to workers employed by governmental organizations regardless of industry. Fatal injury rates exclude workers under the age of 16 years, volunteers, and resident military. The number of fatal work injuries represents total published fatal injuries before the exclusions. For additional information on the fatal work injury rate methodology changes please see <http://www.bls.gov/iif/osh/os/nice10.htm>.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2011.



How do we make those commitments more visible? I've suggested before in this space that people take a snapshot of the family member their co-workers will meet in the hospital if they are injured and put that snapshot on the front of their hardhat. Make it personal, make it visible.

Perhaps this week we can honor the victims of the Colorado tragedy by taking more proactive steps to make our projects safer. Make our commitments visible. And perhaps we can take a snap shot of one of the victims there, perhaps six year old Veronica Moser—the youngest victim of the mad man—and place that photo on our hardhats. We can recommit to the prevention of tragedies large and small. We're on the front lines and we have the ability to change our industry, our workplaces and the quality of life of our employees. We can't let darkness cover our world. Like Dylan Thomas, we should "rage, rage against the dying of the light." The built environment



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makes our world better; let's commit to making our world safer. We're in charge of that and we're called to that challenge. And while we're doing that, let's keep victims of senseless violence and preventable accidents foremost in our thoughts and prayers.