



THE CROCODILE'S TALE

By Jürgen Tietz

“We don't have that much time, we are running shifts here!” is the most frequent objection I get and I call it ‘The crocodile syndrome’. It's a tall order for the team leader to manage the morning meeting. She has to cover the agenda, review yesterday in detail – output, quality & waste, efficiency & performance, breakdowns & stoppages. Then there is the attendance register, people issues in the team, a production problem, investigating a customer come back and a briefing bulletin. Add to this the request from maintenance, last minute production schedule changes, reassigning responsibilities and the test-run by the process engineers. All this in 5 minutes, and no word on SAFETY, even though it was top of the agenda!

I have a novel way of making the people ‘who push the buttons and use the tools’ see that RISK is like Ingwenya, **the crocodile**. It lies quiet, motionless and patient and all seems well, seems safe, as if nothing is happening, except, it is waiting for the right moment! It knows no haste, no ‘busyness’, it just knows its time will come. If the RISK crocodile is deprived of time and attention or treated with disdain, it comes alive with devastating speed and force, often most vicious and with fatal consequences, which is the nature of this beast!

It's tough **being dead serious** about something that does not constitute a predicament right now, until one day we are ‘caught off guard’ and the crocodile strikes! Employees ‘see’ how serious we really are about SAFETY, based on how much of the finite and **limited resources of time and money** we spend on it.

‘If you haven't got the **time to do it right**, when will you find the time to do it over?’ says Jeffrey Mayer and it applies to SAFETY as well, because we always make time to investigate a serious accident or fatality. We stop everything to do this, because now SAFETY is really important! This is a typical case of ‘the more haste the less speed’ and starving the crocodile! **Time pressure** forces people into the ‘bicycle shed and reactor syndrome’ - only trivial issues like the problems at the bicycle shed get raised, while the important fundamentals like the SAFETY at the reactor get glossed over. Again, the crocodile is lurking out of sight, biding its time!

SAFETY is in a different league. It requires a **pro-active mind set**, and it compels all of us to become professional crocodile hunters. The secret of a successful SAFETY effort does not lie in corrective action and compliance. If we have a “Speedcop” mentality, we will never win the SAFETY game and kill the crocodile. It is about **prevention** and the habit of looking below the surface, where the crocodile is hanging out. Distraction is often the root cause for misunderstandings, which in turn can lead to incidents.

MY SAFETY GOSPEL

These three: ‘Systems equipment and people – but the greatest of these is people.’



The **crocodile hunting** business is a tough one. It requires a high degree of observation and thinking pro-actively, combined with persistence and follow up. Because of the nature of the crocodile, spotting the lurking RISK, followed by prompt and ruthless action, is called for. Like the crocodile, accidents have been around for eons. Like the crocodile, accidents pounce 'out of the blue'. Never become complacent! Never take it for granted that the waters are safe! Never assume that people are natural croc hunters!

The only way to effectively kill off and keep in check crocodiles, is to turn all employees into expert and vigilant **croc hunters**. Don't attempt the short cut of taming or even worse, playing with the crocodile and be on the alert of the cute, little crocs (near misses, first aid cases or unusual occurrences), because they are a warning that the big monster is lurking nearby.

There are three further crocodile lessons. Sometimes we can not kill the croc, but have to **live with the risk**, like when we are using the roads. Then we need to treat the risk with respect and care, be 110% alert and avoid taking chances or playing games by keeping our eye on the ball / crocodile all the time. Secondly, the crocodile **feeds not every day**, but it has an appetite for crisis and chaos, haste, change and modifications, distraction, carelessness as well as laziness. Short cuts, assumptions, complacency, disobedience, impatience, indecisiveness, horseplay and alcohol are also part of its diet. Not thinking and being unobservant are too part of the menu. Thirdly, even with the best training and care we are bound to have some **croc attacks**. We should plan for these emergencies and disasters, practice the drills and be prepared to minimize the damage caused by a croc attack.

I have revolutionized the **training of croc hunters** by launching a novel and unique, exciting and fun, innovative, behavior based approach. This new, electronic paradigm is about shifting behavioural SAFETY through visual, real life images and examples, giving new insight. I put the spotlight back on the basics, especially for those people 'who push the buttons and use the tools'. This is why I am using the high-tech route of **electronic, multi-media format**, with rich graphics, video clips, sound, genuine local photos and lots of benchmark examples. My approach persuades the supervisor and his team to own and **make time to work** on SAFETY. **e-KHULUMA**, my "trading name" and also the name of my toolbox talks, means **let's TALK**, with remarkable results for my clients.