Effects of Myths, Superstitions and Beliefs on Public Safety; the Role of the Safety Professional

Presented by

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Introduction
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs
Extent of the Problem
Definition of terms (Myths, Superstition, Beliefs and Public Safety)
Mindset Traps
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Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs model

- Self-actualization
- Esteem
- Love/belonging
- Safety
- Physiological
In the absence of economic safety – due to economic crisis and lack of work opportunities – these safety needs manifest themselves in ways such as a preference for job security, grievance procedures for protecting the individual from unilateral authority, savings accounts, insurance policies, disability, accommodations, etc. This level is more likely to be found in children as they generally have a greater need to feel safe.
In his theory, he identified Safety and Security needs to include; Personal security, Financial security, Health and well-being, Safety net against accidents/illness and their adverse impacts.

Though Maslow’s work was quite expansive, it must be noted that he used a few noble specimens to arrive at his conclusion and not the whole set of humans though on representative basis since it would be difficult to gather all humans at a place to research on them.
For instance, Maslow did not include the physically challenged in his studies and even every child. He postulated that one begins to think about his safety and security after achieving most other needs of life.

While one cannot disprove Maslow’s postulation that the subset thinks of Safety and Security, I rise with specific examples to say that every human starts to think of his Safety and security when he starts to be aware of his environment.
Public Safety

To understand Public Safety, we must first of all define the two key words making the phrase. According to free online dictionary Public means the following;

- Concerning the people as a whole.
- Open to or shared by all the people of an area or country.
- Ordinary people in general; the community.

Safety is defined as; “being free from danger” therefore, Public Safety is Safety pertaining to the whole and not a subset. For instance, Safety in the Oil and Gas Industry is a subset of Public Safety. In Public Safety you find home safety, road safety, food safety, company safety etc.
The public is where you find all children, students, market women, lecturers, artisans, waste management agencies, farmers, urban dwellers, specialists, experts, professors, engineers, religious leaders, ethnic nationalities, traditional rulers and in one phrase, “everyone in the society”. All the neglected sectors of the society are part of this. It has been identified and proved that two major accident causal factors are behaviour and attitude. What shapes behaviour and attitude? Could be formal or informal learning. This is the reason behind the trainings and inductions given to new employees, short service employees schemes etc. It helps to cascade the company’s objectives to the new employee with a view to ensuring the employee’s safety while maintaining a good reputation.
There is a drawing on the internet that is going viral; it is a picture of a Nursery School fence with the drawing of a Giraffe but labelled mouse. At the footnote is the comment, “please join us lets pray for the children in this school”. Now imagine a child in that school believing that the giraffe is actually a mouse. Such is what you learn from birth or youth.
Bayelsa ex-commissioner’s son, girlfriend burnt to death

Zovoe Jonathan 1 month ago

The burnt house. Photo: Simon Utebor

Simon Utebor, Yenagoa

Breaking News: Explosion rocks CBN Calabar, many killed

ADEKUNLE
11 MAR 2016

By Emma Una

CALABAR- EIGHTEEN people were on Friday morning roasted while others sustained third degree burns in an inferno at the Central Bank of Nigeria, CBN, following an explosion at the premises of the Bank located at Calabar Road by the Millennium Park.

The explosion which took place at about 11.15am on Friday, sent many of the bank staff running for their lives.
Fire razes building in Lagos, kills octogenarian

By Odita Sunday | 14 September 2016 | 2:06 am

The burnt building

An early morning fire yesterday razed a building at No. 5, Aborishade Close, Lawanson area of Lagos State and burnt an octogenarian, Mr. Godwin Oyia, to death. The incident, sources say was caused by a short circuit in the building.

Council staff electrocuted in Ikorodu

by Agency Reporter, February 19, 2016 at 9:17 pm in News Update

Tragedy struck on Thursday in Ikorodu Local Government of Lagos State when a revenue officer with the council was electrocuted.

The police spokesperson in Lagos, SP Oladapo Badmos, said in a statement on Friday that the victim, Mrs Toyin Ogunjebe, was electrocuted in her office at the council secretariat.

"She was taken to Ikorodu General Hospital where she was confirmed dead.

"Her corpse has been deposited at the hospital's morgue for autopsy," the statement said.
Some recent accidents

Horrific: Five killed, 15 injured as bus crash into car on Lagos-Ibadan expressway

- An accident along Lagos-Ibadan expressway has led to the death of 5 people
- The accident also led to the injury of 15 people
- A Mazda bus reportedly crashed into Mitsubishi car after a wrong overtaking
Three dead as 40 feet contains falls on bus, okada riders in Lagos [PHOTOS]

By Wale Odunsi on July 6, 2016
@dailypostng

But for God’s intervention, many people would have either died or get seriously injured after a dilapidated electric pole belonging to the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), fell on two Keke Marwa (Tricycles), along the ever busy Oriyomi Street in Ikeja, Lagos State.
Scores killed in Akwa Ibom church building collapse

By Dickson S. Adama, Uyo | Publish Date: Dec 11 2016 2:00AM

Two dead, 17 injured as another building collapses in Akwa Ibom

By Dennis Udoma & Chioma Onuegbu

UYO—No fewer than two persons have been confirmed dead, while 17 others sustained various degrees of injury, yesterday, following another building collapse at Urua Edet-Obo, a popular market at Ikot Akpaktek, in Onna Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.
Many consider these three words to be same and indivisible though similar, they are different just like behavior is different from attitude but similar.

Myth is defined as a traditional story especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining some natural or social phenomenon and typically involving supernatural beings or events. It is a widely held but false belief or idea. Multiethnic Nigeria like so many other countries of the world developed myths peculiar to their own culture.
Each ethnic group had her myths. In fact some myths simply helped to identify and tag certain ethnic groups. Some myths include:

- Why people do not go to the market on certain days.
- The quarrel between the sun and moon resulting in rainbow.
- Story of River Benue and Niger confluence.
- Why the tortoise is the most cunning animal.
- The tortoise tricking other animals to eat their share of food and the resultant punishment received.
- And many more.

As mentioned earlier, some myths were fake stories to help instil moral values in Children while some rather than instil such values created fear and sometimes enmity amongst ethnic groups.
A case in reference is that of a man whose wife was in serious labour and the nearest specialist maternity hospital belonged to another man from a certain tribe classified in a myth as “CUNNING”. Instead of going to that hospital, the man travelled too far to get to another hospital only for the situation to get complicated and he was referred to the same hospital he was avoiding, luckily his wife survived. That is what myth can do. With all due respect to the people of Mbaise tribe, I grew up hearing other Igbo speaking people say thus, “when confronted by an Mbaise man and a snake, it is better to kill that Mbaise man rather than the snake”, depicting the Mbaise man to be worse than a snake. Can that be true? Are all the wicked Nigerians from Mbaise? Ethnicity is fuelled by certain myths, we must preach diversity.
Superstition is the belief in supernatural casualty i.e. that one event causes another without any natural process linking the two events such as use of totem and amulets for protection against accidents, astrology, religions, omens, witchcraft, prophecies that contradict natural science. I don’t seek to negate the fact that these things may be in existent or to contest the God reality however, these mode of reasoning has proved to be a problem to so many people. Its application has shown a lack of understanding. It has proved to be a leading cause of accidents.
I entered a public bus one day some years ago, the driver was obviously very reckless and was over speeding. I was sitting in the front passengers seat and I noticed that he had a ring on his fore finger and each time there seemed to be danger approaching he would point the finger towards the direction. I wasn’t comfortable with his speed so immediately we got to the checkpoint I reported him to the authorities and he was given a very serious warning. He told the authorities that despite his speed nothing possibly could go wrong. In defiance he chose to drive in snail speed and I did not mind at all. Eventually, I got to my destination and alighted. A few passengers walked up to me to say thank you that they were really scared the way he was driving.
For instance, the Christian religion says, “faith without works is dead” and does acknowledge the fact that one has to back prayer with action or back action with prayer. Also, there is an Ibibio saying, “Obong akam ofop mong ke ubom” interpreted thus, “while praying keep bailing the water out of the boat” which means back prayer with action. A certain motorcyclist that was involved in a major accident kept saying, “if I had known that my babalawo (Juju Priest) lied to me that nothing would happen to me despite my incessant over speeding I would have been more careful, now I lay here with both legs lost crying like a woman”. There is a story of a man that went into the Lion’s cage to pray with the Lions claiming he was Daniel incarnate. You need not ask what happened to him, it’s obvious. Do we accept safety principles or do we just believe that nothing would happen?
Can you try this TV? Tested and trusted but with no colors or maybe just two colors.

Can you try this? Ultra HD a viewers delight.
Photo Gallery weighing the past against the present

Was in few very rich homes and it required a key to regulate its use.

You only need a password to lock this phone, everything happens in real time.
Photo Gallery weighing the past against the present

Cooking stove, the two in one – quite recent technology though going obsolete.

Now you can bake, grill, fry, cook etc all in and with one machine.
The Role of the Safety Professional

- Public Safety in Nigeria has long been neglected. As you drive the streets you see all manners of at risk behaviours, unsafe acts and unsafe conditions. While many would say, “it’s not my portion”, how many are aware that safety principles can help reduce incidents. Even when they are aware, how many follow them? In my presence, a lady bought a new sophisticated phone and without thinking threw away the manual. I had to call her back to pick her manual as it could help her one day when the need arose. Such is the mindset.
Fire incidents, building collapse, vehicle accidents, burns etc have become normal. Everyday you read about one tragedy or the other with monumental effects. It is imperative to work to create necessary Safety awareness that would reduce this trend and this is the role of the Safety Professional. It is an intensive campaign that must be measureable and targeted.
Identifying Mindset Traps

Question: How can the Safety Professional identify a person acting on a belief, myth or superstition?
Answer: His words, body language and actions will tell. Also, friends. Like it is said, “show me your friends and I will tell you who you are”.
Dealing with Mindset Traps

Questions: How can you help someone acting that way?

Answers: So many factors prevent people from accepting the opinion of others even when they are obviously wrong and the other person is right therefore you must be patient, tactful, ask open ended questions that can provide insight into the problem, offer help in a less obvious way, offer guidance, appear very concerned and honest, avoid bias, give room for explanations and always think outside the box. Do not seem to mock him by laughing at his wrong opinion. Do not be judgmental and hold no preconceived opinion.
Conclusion

- The Safety Professional’s role in accident prevention cannot be over emphasised. Most accidents are caused by people as a result of mindset traps formed from some age long myths, superstitions and beliefs. When you remove the problem from the root you have dissipated the problem hence the need to vigorously campaign against certain myths, superstitions and beliefs while providing help and information about new ways of doing things and modern trends.
- This is a part of my work and it is a direct result of several interviews and research into accident prevention in Nigeria, the lasting solution.
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