



NATIONAL  
SPEAKERS  
BUREAU

# GOLD MEDAL SAFETY

USING AN OLYMPIC MINDSET TO KEEP SAFETY FRESH



# By The Numbers

## Olympic Preventable Fatality Statistics

 10

**Beijing**  
2008

 14

**Athens**  
2004

 60

**Sochi**  
2014

# O

# London

# 2012

Now that's an  
**Olympic record**  
to strive for!

**There is hope.** The London games pursued safety with an overt Olympic mindset and delivered the best safety performance on record for a summer games. Not one worker died due to workplace neglect.

# The Pillars of Gold Medal Safety



1. No Excuses



2. Focus on the  
Little Things



3. Share the  
Wisdom



4. Have a  
Philosophy



5. Preparation



6. Strengthen the  
Opinion Muscle



# 1

## No Excuses

Organizations with low safety leadership justify their poor safety record with a couple of arguments.

The first is about cost. “We can’t afford it,” they’ll say. How much does a human life cost? Moreover, what are the legal costs of a workplace death or serious injury? Companies with the worst safety records also struggle to meet quality standards and on-time delivery.

**Bottom line:** *Safety is not only the moral choice, it's good business*

The second excuse for accidents is that, as humans, we can’t be perfect. Mistakes are bound to happen, but if we have a healthy safety culture, nobody gets hurt. Equipment can break. People can’t.

If your goal is not Zero-Harm let’s  
**clarify what your goal is, and then see  
how hard we can work to hit that goal.**





# 2

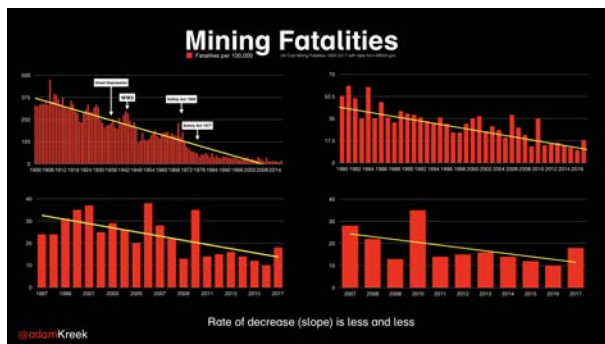
## Focus on the Little Things

### AN OLYMPIC-SIZED METAPHOR

Olympic rowing times keep getting faster, but the rate of improvement is slowing. It takes increasing effort to achieve the next world record. Interestingly, we have found a similar rate of advancement in safety records.

### Hitting Your Goal of Zero-Harm:

What makes for a safer environment? It's focusing on the little things that matter. To win Olympic gold, athletes, coaches and their support staff must make hundreds of tiny adjustments to technique, technology, leadership and social interaction.



### To achieve the Gold Medal of Safety we need to have the same mindset:

- How can you make on-site meetings more effective?
- How can you better empower all employees to use the lines of communication?
- How can you take better advantage of near misses and other safety moments?





# 3

## Share the Wisdom



Before competing at the Olympics, I funded my sporting journey by working on a drilling rig – and I'm lucky to be alive. A new driller who had quickly become too aggressive operating the controls pulled a giant pipe out of the hole too fast, and it swung across the rig, straight for my head. The two-ton piece of steel knocked off my hard hat. I was one inch away from becoming a pancake. He yelled at me. I was green and young. I looked back with terror and did what he asked.

Thankfully, I had an older crew with me on the drilling floor, who reported the incident to the foreman who corrected the situation. I'm grateful to have benefited from that safety leadership. Otherwise, I would not be alive today.

### **The older and wiser we become, the more responsibility we must take:**

- Are you being a safety leader and looking out for less experienced and younger crew?
- Are you a younger worker and aware that your youthful ambition can fuel unsafe behaviour?
- Do you have the courage to speak up and exercise safety leadership?



# 4

## Have a Philosophy

Five years after my Olympic victory, I helped lead a deep-ocean rowing expedition that rowed a 10-meter research vessel from Africa to America. Our crew embraced a Gold Medal Safety philosophy called: **Don't Die**. And I'm glad we did. 73 days into our expedition, we capsized in the Bermuda triangle due to inclement weather. No one was injured. No one died.

**Our three rules were tongue-in-cheek but the meaning became very serious every time we experienced a broken oar or other safety incident on the boat.**

- Don't die
- Don't kill your mates
- Don't sink the boat

We committed to caring for ourselves, caring for each other and caring for our equipment. And, despite disaster, our expedition crew received commendations from the US coast guard for our preparation, training, safety tools and safety procedures aboard our vessel.







# 5

## Preparation

Safety was no accident. It came from thoughtful preparation. We accessed training, planned thoroughly and analyzed risk.

Onboard we had back-ups for our back-ups and a full array of safety equipment, including a sea anchor, emergency life raft, Mustang inflatable life vests with tie-down ropes and an ACR Artex emergency locator beacon for each rower.

**Like any mega project, we started small and worked our way up to the trans-Atlantic project.**

- Starting out with one-day trips in manageable waters
- Focused on training and worked our way up to multi-day trips in larger waters.
- The final step was a 24 days expedition to circumnavigate Vancouver Island.



“Our team was motivated to be safe, and team took the time to prepare properly. The planning and preparation for this expedition took five years. A lot happens in five years. By the time we launched to go across the Ocean, I had a two and a half-year-old son and my wife was pregnant with our second child.” – **Adam Kreek**



# 6

## Build Up the Opinion Muscle

Despite our training, experience and analysis, my wife asked me to undertake an exercise that raised my bar for safety leadership. “In case you die,” she asked, “I want our son to know why you did this. Can you write a letter to our son ...just in case you don’t make it?”

This letter was the hardest letter I have ever written in my life.

I know what the letter did for me. It strengthened a muscle not intuitive to ocean rowing: the opinion muscle. Writing this note drilled into my heart the reason for caring. Deep, unabashed caring gives us the courage to speak up, and the courage to exercise our opinion muscles.

### Is this an activity you could replicate in your safety training?

- Imagine if each member of your construction crew, or work shift, had to write a letter to their child explaining why their job was meaningful enough to take their life. What would it say?
- Imagine if the foreman had to write a letter to the family of the worker who died on site explaining why the project needed their loved one’s life to be successful. What would it say?





# These insights were **brought to you by** Adam Kreek

## **FEATURED PRESENTATION:**

*Safety First: Courage,  
Communication & Stress  
Response*

Adam draws upon industry experience, his Olympic career and Ocean expeditions to teach powerful and practical strategies to sustain safety by taking personal responsibility for effective communication and stress management in high-risk work environments. This industry-customized, thought-provoking and behavior-changing keynote provides audiences with practical communication and conflict resolution models for safe work environments.

He was relevant to our business, and had a fascinating story. He spoke to the people in the room, leaving a lasting and positive impact that traveled through our office. I have heard nothing but rave reviews from all our employees.

- **VP Marketing, General Mills**

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