



My First Latent Cause Experience

The year was 2001. I walked into my new office. I'd spent life after college in the field, either performing, supervising, or inspecting industrial construction. I had intimate knowledge of pipeline regulations, which helped me land this new job. Little did I know what I didn't know. Well, there I was in my office, excited for the future, trying to learn the ropes, when, a few minutes into my dream morning, my boss, the district director, leaned into my office and said, "We just had a major incident losing a mainline pump." I was expecting "Good morning" or something along those lines. My smile left as I heard him say, "Rob, you need to do a root cause

analysis." I kept my cool, and without missing a beat, I said, ...

"No problem, I'm on it." Inside I was screaming like the kid from the movie Home Alone.

I had never done a root cause analysis. I didn't know what one really even was. I was sweating bullets, and I needed help. I knew there was no way I could do this without help. This was not the way I wanted to start my new job, but circumstance sometimes has its own imagination. So there I was, without a clue what to do, anxiety increasing with every tick of the clock, my mind racing. I had to figure it out immediately! I grabbed my field gear and slipped into the district director's office and shared what he already knew: that I didn't have any root cause analysis training or background. He was kind and acted surprised but graciously said we have people who can help and offered me someone to call. That led me to find a coworker with experience who was willing to come and lead the investigation. This was my initial training. I followed along, trying to learn as much as I could. That investigation was painful, to say the least. When it was said and done, the biggest learning or takeaway I had was that I needed training. I immediately began searching. Our company used Failsafe Network, and as I searched, I discovered the next class in our region was a month away in Billings, Montana.

That day came quicker than I could imagine. There I was in the midst of around 30 other people from various industries. And then I met Bob Nelms, the founder of Failsafe. My first impression of Bob was he looked like the quintessential professional; he was so



comfortable, organized, and, at times, serious. He was incredibly gracious; this could be in comparison with the group I worked with, for we weren't known for our gracious behavior. He was a professional listener and a fantastic

trainer. The class was so engaging. I'll never forget how the class started; drawing a mandala. "Draw whatever you want," he said, "this will be the most important exercise of the class." I thought, how can doodling on paper be the most important thing in a four-day class? He had my attention. The Mandala was a great icebreaker and had everybody smiling. And we were off and running talking about evidence and two trains, a repair train, which is fast, and a slow train to investigate. We talked about the space shuttle Challenger. We talked about lawnmowers. We talked about a van that caught on fire. We learned about evidence, evidence, and evidence. We learned about three p's, four p's, and five items. Through it all, we learned how to investigate a failure, how to perform a latent cause analysis, and, more importantly, **how to learn from things that go wrong.**

I loved those four days. I had never experienced anything like it. I agreed with Bob, it wasn't training, it was an experience. I wanted to return to work and use my new skills; I was primed and ready.

I went to Billings to get trained to do latent cause analysis. I didn't return trained; I returned changed. Rob was different and changed for the better. If you ever have the pleasure of meeting my wife, you can ask her about it. She will tell you that those four days in Billings were the beginning of her husband's change for the better. Everyone at work noticed a change, too!

I'd love to hear your story about the first time you attended 'The Latent Cause Experience' and what you took away from the encounter.