

# SAFETY FOR THE FIELD HAND ROOKIE

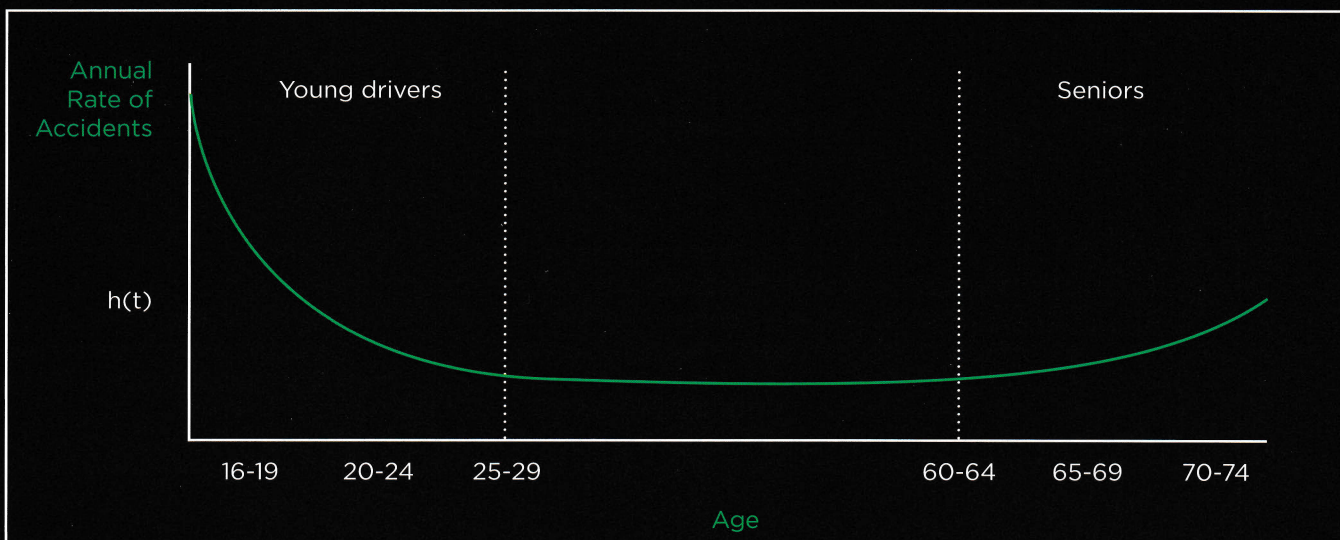
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I have a passion for the oil and gas business. With more than 42 years working in the business, I have seen a lot of changes in that time. All three of my children and their families are also “in the business.” One thing that never changes, however, in any business or other activity, is the Rookie. The Field Hand Rookie, to be exact.

Someone once said, “Safety is the management of risk.” Everyone understands the concept of a “safe” bet, right? The bettor has figured the odds of success at a level of risk so low, they can’t lose. That can work if you really know the odds of the game but it still comes down to personal risk tolerance for the bet. What if you don’t know the real odds or even how to play the game? Enter “The Rookie.”

Consider this chart that illustrates the accident rates from young, inexperienced drivers to senior drivers:



## BATHTUB CURVE HAZARD FUNCTION

It doesn’t take rocket science to see the risk of failure (accidents, incidents, crashes and so forth) occurs more frequently with the Rookie and eventually levels off with the more mature, experienced driver. What is happening with our “Senior” drivers? Why is the rate going back up after thirty years of relative calm? In human factor terms, let me suggest the answer lies in the concept of competency.

Competency means capability. Although we use it to mean someone has a sufficient qualification, it comes from the word compete; meaning someone with competency is good enough to compete with other candidates. In our example, we are competing with the other drivers out there. By extension, let’s look at this in terms of our Field Rookie and his or her competencies.

First, let’s start with the First Regime. This is the time that the Rookie initially takes on a new job in this business. That person is what I call “Unconsciously Incompetent.” Sounds horrible, I know, but think of it this way, the “Unconsciously Incompetent” person simply does not know what he does not know. Our Rookie, at this point, is dangerous to themselves and others because they are unaware of the risks and dangers of the job, work environment, and other influences that they are about to face. This is truly the most dangerous time, and the chart reflects this. It is for this reason, OSHA and other Health, Safety and Environmental agencies all require training on the specific hazards associated with doing a job, before the employee does the job. It is a universally accepted concept. It is the most important time to focus resources. You get the best return on your investment here.

Orientations, basic training, and testing are mandatory by the regulators. Testing for understanding the task by written, verbal, demonstration or other means is mandatory. In addition to these tools, we add the

observation/intervention aspect from our various Behavior-Based Safety programs. In essence, we are all watching out for our Rookies out there, adding our experience to their inexperience. Add a good mentor to this mix and we are well on the way to moving our Rookie to a lower level of accident risk, the Second Regime; that of a Consciously Incompetent Rookie.

The Second Regime occurs after the orientations, the initial training, the explaining, the testing and the like. We move our Rookie to a higher state of awareness of his personal and operational safety by making them understand that they now know what they don't know or they are Consciously Incompetent. At this stage, we hope that the Rookie knows there is a lot to know about their job and work environment and they cannot always depend on "Common Sense" because that concept is also based upon experience for a particular set of past experiences. What appears to be "Common Sense" for one person is totally elusive to another without similar (common) experiences. With experience(s), our Unconsciously Incompetent person starts to look around, ask questions, seek answers and the curve starts to flatten out to that Third Regime of safety for our Rookie. At this point, our Rookie sheds most (but not all) of their "Rookieness" (my word) to enter the world of the "Consciously Competent" person.

In the Third Regime, our Consciously Competent Rookie knows the job but also knows they cannot possibly know everything about the job due to lack of experience(s), so they are willing to accept that and continue to ask questions, research a job, pre-plan, discuss with others about their experiences, etc. In this regime, our safest regime, our Rookie has matured, but is still learning and does so consciously, always trying to better their knowledge and skills in whatever job they attempt. Always thinking, always improving, but...

Lastly our Fourth Regime is that of the Senior. What happened to them in our chart? The rates of incidents are climbing up at almost the same rate as our Rookie's rate in the first two regimes went down! Enter the "Unconsciously Competent" person. This person has been doing the job so long, they operate unconsciously, on autopilot or automatic, or as some have said, instinctively. The Unconsciously Competent person has forgotten that influences of the work (or driving in this case) environment have changed. The job or task may have subtly changed. Even the driver/worker may have changed physically and/or mentally or most importantly, their attitude may have changed.

It is a fact, that a very large percentage (80-90 percent) of factors leading to substandard acts or substandard conditions are based upon attitude. A poor safety attitude can develop when the experienced person loses sight of the fact that no matter how long they have done a job, they have never had enough experience to have seen it all, and that causes the Senior to start making Rookie mistakes and errors, causing the curve to climb again. We want our Unconsciously Competent person to go back to being the Consciously Competent person again.

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