

October

SOBELUTIONS

2015

WHAT IF SOMETHING IS WRONG AND NO ONE TELLS YOU ABOUT IT?

This summer a middle aged veteran counselor, head of a camp's swim program, began complaining of chest pains to his swim staff. This counselor and the swim staff beneath him all knew of his preexisting and serious heart condition. The counselor complained of chest pain to his staff for four days in a row and his staff urged him to seek medical help. He refused.

Unfortunately, on the fourth night he had a massive heart attack in bed and died. As a long time well loved staffer, the effect of his death midsummer was a traumatic event for the entire camp and required grief counseling and close monitoring of the campers for the rest of the summer.

It is quite possible that had he heeded their advice a trip to the hospital might have saved his life.

So what lessons can we learn from this tragedy?

On March 27, 1977, the deadliest aviation disaster in history occurred in Tenerife, in the Canary Islands. Two fully loaded 747's crashed on a foggy runway, killing 583 people. While the different countries involved in the subsequent investigation came up with several reasons that contributed to the accident, one eerie parallel to the story at hand is undisputed.

The captain of the KLM 747 was one of their most experienced pilots, and was chief of KLM flight training. Due to the weather and other delays, the flight was already behind schedule which increased the captains' anxiety to get the plane in the air. Communication between the air traffic controllers and both 747's was not entirely clear, but the KLM captain radioed for clearance and before the answer was given, hit the throttles at full speed. The co-pilot advised the captain that clearance had not been given and the KLM flight engineer expressed his concern that the Pan Am 747 had not moved off the runway. Still the captain proceeded anyway and struck the parked Pan Am 747.

As a result the aviation industry adopted "crew resource management," a set of training procedures to reduce human error that focuses on interpersonal communication, leadership and decision making. The concept was intended to foster a less authoritarian cockpit culture, where co-pilots were encouraged to question captains if they observed them making mistakes.

What if the swim staff had told the camp director about the swim director's repeated complaints of chest pain? Would he still be alive today? Certainly this is food for thought and a good topic for discussion at staff orientation.

Michael Labadorf CPCU Executive Vice President

