CULTURE OF CARE:
YOUR VOICE SAVES LIVES

Turning Safety from a Policy into a Personal Commitment

At the 2026 Private Motor Truck Council of Canada (PMTC) Annual Conference, transportation leaders gathered for an impactful and emotional panel discussion titled *Culture of Care: Your Voice Saves Lives.* The session challenged attendees to think beyond compliance and consider a more fundamental question: *What kind of workplace culture are we creating when it comes to safety?*

Moderated by Charlie Charalambous of the Infrastructure Health and Safety Association (IHSA), the panel brought together three distinct perspectives on workplace safety and culture: Michelle Roberts, Vice President of Stakeholder and Public Relations at IHSA, who provided insight into building effective safety cultures; Jennifer Wright of Threads of Life, who shared the personal and lasting impact of workplace tragedy; and Justin Bauder, National Fleet Manager at Giant Tiger Wholesale Limited, who offered practical fleet safety and leadership experiences from an operational perspective.



Together, their perspectives reinforced the importance of speaking up, taking action, and creating workplaces where safety is everyone's responsibility, while exploring how organizations can move from compliance and complacency to compassion, accountability, and action.

Setting the Stage: The Human Cost of Workplace Tragedy

The discussion began with a viewing of *The George Mercer Story,* a powerful video that highlights the devastating consequences of a preventable workplace incident. Delegates were encouraged to reflect on the ripple effects of workplace injuries and fatalities, not only on workers, but also on their families, friends, co-workers, employers, and entire communities.

Building on that message, Jennifer Wright shared personal stories and memories of her father, George Mercer, and the profound impact his workplace fatality had on her family. Her remarks served as a reminder that behind every incident statistic is a person, a family, and a future forever changed.



Jennifer also spoke about the support she received through Threads of Life, a Canadian charity that supports families affected by workplace tragedy and promotes prevention through education and awareness. Through the organization's peer support programs, advocacy efforts, training, and public speaking opportunities, Jennifer discovered a way to turn her personal loss into meaningful action by sharing her family's story and supporting others navigate similar experiences.



Why Speaking Up Matters



A recurring theme throughout the discussion was the importance of empowering workers to report hazards before incidents occur. In high-risk industries like transportation, complacency can become one of the greatest threats to safety. Procedures may become routine, shortcuts may be normalized, and workers may begin to accept risks simply because "that's the way we've always done it."

Justin Bauder emphasized that mindset as one of the most dangerous attitudes in any workplace. Drawing from his experience in fleet operations, he reflected on the difficult conversations he has had with families following workplace incidents and the lasting impact those experiences have had on his approach to safety leadership. His message was clear: experience should never be confused with invulnerability. The longer someone works in the industry, the more important it becomes to stay vigilant, ask questions, and challenge unsafe practices.

Building Trust Through Action

One of the most important questions posed during the panel was: *"What must employers do to ensure that when a hazard is reported, action actually follows?"*



Michelle Roberts' answer was straightforward: employers must follow up. Workers need to see that their concerns are heard, investigated, and

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acted upon. When safety concerns are raised without a response, trust erodes; however, when organizations respond quickly, implement corrective actions, communicate the results, and demonstrate a visible commitment to safety at every level, they reinforce the message that every voice matters. By being present, engaged, and accountable, leaders can build trust and create an environment where workers feel empowered to speak up about potential hazards before an incident occurs.

Creating a culture of care means more than having policies in place. It requires leaders to consistently demonstrate through their actions that safety is a core organizational value.

Removing the Fear of Speaking Up

Another challenge discussed was overcoming workers' fear of reporting hazards. Whether the concern is retaliation, embarrassment, or simply the belief that "it's not my job" or "it's not my problem," many workplace hazards go unreported because workers are not confident they will be supported or that their concerns will lead to meaningful action.

Employees must see that safety genuinely matters, not just during audits or inspections, but every day. Leaders who model safe behaviours, listen respectfully, and encourage open communication create environments where workers feel comfortable raising concerns before incidents occur.

When organizations eliminate barriers to reporting and create psychologically safe workplaces, they transform safety from an individual responsibility into a shared commitment.

The Role of a Culture of Care

The panel reinforced that a strong safety culture is built on more than compliance with regulations. True safety excellence emerges when organizations foster a culture where employees look out for one another, intervene when they see unsafe conditions, and understand that speaking up is an act of care and a responsibility of everyone.

The concept aligns closely with IHSA's safety messaging and ongoing efforts to encourage workers to act when they see potential hazards. By empowering employees to report concerns and creating systems that support those reports, organizations can help prevent incidents before they occur.

Continuing the Conversation

IHSA offers a variety of resources designed to help employers and workers strengthen their workplace safety culture. Through campaigns, practical tools, leadership resources, and educational materials, organizations can access guidance to support meaningful culture change and reinforce the message that every worker has a role to play in keeping people safe.

Final Thoughts

The strongest message from the panel was simple: safety is not just about rules; it is about people. Building a true Culture of Care requires a commitment to looking out for one another and the courage to speak up when something doesn't seem right. Every hazard reported, every conversation started, and every intervention made on behalf of a co-worker has the potential to prevent an incident and save a life.

As delegates were reminded in closing, if you see something, say something, because everyone has the right to get home safe, every single day. Ultimately, culture is shaped not by conversations, but by actions. For the fleet leaders, supervisors, drivers, and safety professionals in attendance, the message was clear: creating safer workplaces requires every worker to be empowered to speak up and every leader to be prepared to listen. The decision to speak up may be the very thing that protects someone else.

IHSA Keep Your Promise Campaign
https://www.ihsa.ca/keepyourpromise

Threads of Life
https://threadsoflife.ca

YouTube: See something, say something –
Heartfelt stories of families affected by workplace tragedy.

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