

Return to work achievement (large or self-insured) – Andrew Toepfer

Andrew Toepfer thought he would always be a store person. It wasn't until a freak accident in the workplace happened, that his life changed forever. He was performing a routine task, reversing a stand-up forklift down a ramp, when it tipped over and crushed his right leg.

The injury resulted in complications including a severed femoral artery, which could have been fatal. The seriousness of the injury prevented Andrew from walking and he was confined to a wheelchair, unable to shower or dress unassisted. He was determined to regain his independence.

At the time of injury, the first person to arrive on the scene went into shock. So it was Andrew (who was also the company's first aid officer) who coordinated his own rescue. He instructed other staff members to call an ambulance, get the first aid kit, stop the battery acid from running onto his leg, and get another forklift to remove the one that was crushing him.

Despite the seriousness of the injury, Andrew applied himself to his rehabilitation with determination and a sense of humour, which helped speed up his improvement in function and ultimately his return to work.

A rehabilitation and return to work plan was developed with the cooperation of doctors, specialists, allied health providers, his case manager, and employer Bidvest, and he set about returning to work.

"His willingness to try new exercises without complaint and with determination has been infectious to our other clients who see Andrew as a role model in regaining function after injury," says physiotherapist Rick Beal, who supported Andrew's physical rehabilitation.

The support he has been given by both colleagues and management, and the assistance of his family has seen him return to work on partial duties 18 months after his near-fatal accident. Andrew's success in the new role with Bidvest, for which he eagerly retrained in both computing and office skills, shows how when someone puts their mind to it, they can move to a different area of the same business and be a success.

He currently works two days a week for three hours, and he is using his computer and office administration skills to move the company forward. It is unlikely he will ever be able to drive a forklift again.

Andrew is also working towards regaining his driver's licence which will give him even more independence. Andrew says his motivations for rehabilitation are his family, wanting to earn his own living, and the desire for normality. His other aims are to work fulltime, to play sport with his sons and to walk without crutches.

Bidvest has shown support for Andrew throughout the healing process, encouraging him with his rehabilitation program and keeping in close contact. Andrew says the support of his family, friends and colleagues have got him through. He says he hopes it has created more safety awareness within the workplace.

He has regained his confidence and is looking forward to getting back to some normality in his life.

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