

Remain at work achievement – Robert Redpath and GM Holden

After a workplace injury, injured workers who maintain contact with their co-workers and their employer are often more successful in returning to work than those who disengage.

This was certainly true for injured GM Holden worker, Robert Redpath.

After injuring his back while working on the production line at Holden some years ago, Robert continued working in his usual role. Then, after lifting a heavy tub (17.3 kgs) from floor level late last year, a task he did repeatedly throughout his work day, he sustained another back injury. Diagnosed as a disc protrusion and nerve root irritation, the injury kept him off work for three weeks.

Robert was overwhelmed by the desire to get back to work, because for him, remaining at work meant keeping his life normal.

Three weeks after the injury, he was back at work in a limited capacity for two hours each day. Strong medication prevented him from performing his pre-injury duties so he worked with his injury management associate, Katrina Lindsay, who negotiated part-time on-line and part-time off-line duties to form a graduated return to work plan.

That said, he faced many challenges such as the overwhelming pain he experienced when bending to get dressed and when he tried to drive. Again he worked with Katrina to find ways around these difficulties. GM Holden provided him with cab charges to get to and from work, and to see his health providers when he couldn't drive.

Robert and Katrina worked with his health providers, slowly increasing his hours and duties. At the time, Robert's doctor believed he would take six months for a return to his normal duties. Robert is proud to say he, "was able to achieve this in just two and a half months from the date of his assessment".

After the accident Robert and Katrina undertook an 'incident investigation' to address the issue that caused his workplace injury. After much discussion they found solutions that would prevent a similar injury from happening again. A new system of work was introduced which changed the process from having to lift the heavy tubs from floor level and load them onto a machine, to having a lifter and decanting parts into the tub at waist height. This significantly reduced manual handling and load for the operator.

By effectively remaining at work, Robert was able to maintain contact with his work colleagues, and show them that although he was injured, he could still contribute in a meaningful way to the workplace. Katrina credits his positive attitude and continuous connection to his workplace, as well as his employer's active demonstration of a commitment to improve workplace safety, as helping him remain at work.

"Robert made a consistent and speedy recovery and return to work. He surpassed all expectations in relation to his recovery timeframes and was dedicated to managing his injury in a positive manner," Katrina says.

"This is an excellent example of a successful return to work and I will use this example as a tool to educate all of our injured workers on the power of a positive attitude and focus on return to work," she says.

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