



COMPLACENCY:

**Seeing the Signs,
Resetting the Risk**



The Marble Stairs Story



Rhonda Piggee Johnson MS, CSP

Safety Consultant

SafeStart

rhonda@safestart.com

Today's Presentation



Complacency Characteristics

What makes this human factor more elusive than others?



Warning Signs

If complacency is an invisible human factor, how can we find it?



No-blame Strategies

How can we counteract the effects of complacency?



safestart.com/complacency-session/

Download the slides by
scanning this code.



What is Complacency?

Uncovering the hidden human factor.

Human Factors

States

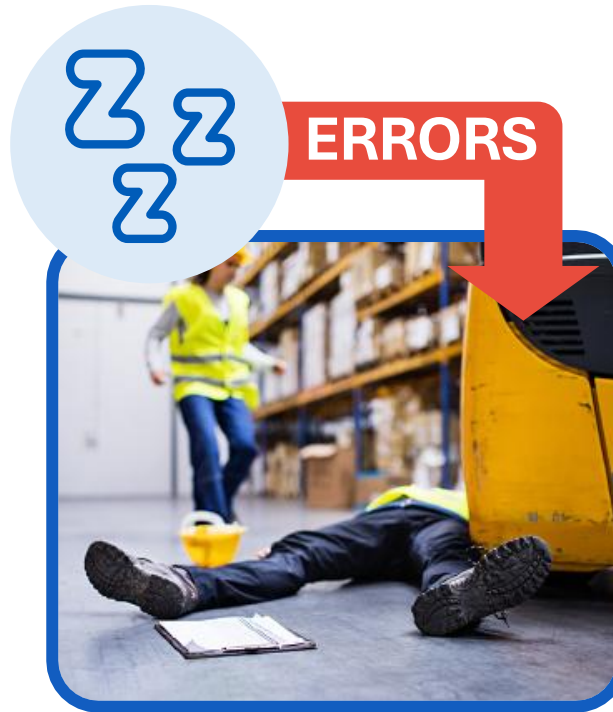
Cause

Errors

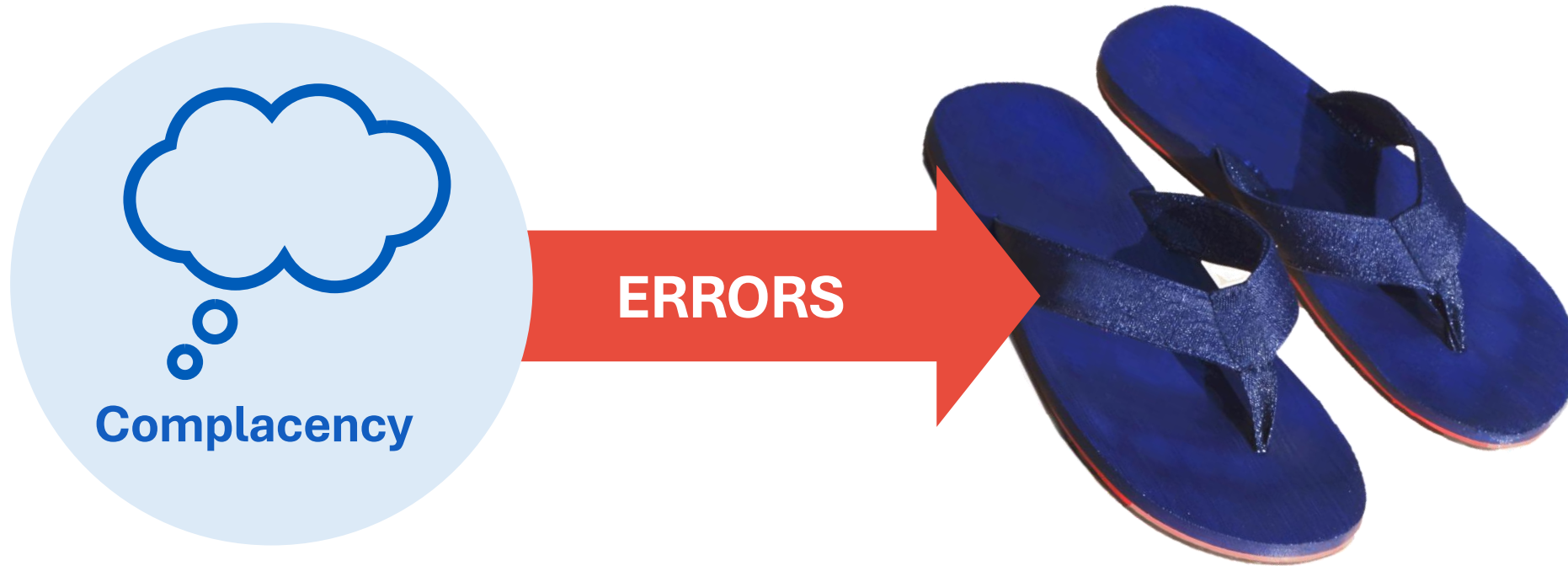
Which Increase Risk



Examples of Human Factors and Errors



Complacency and the Staircase



How Human Factors Feel



Feeling
rushed?
Slow down.



Feeling
frustrated?
Calm down.



Feeling
fatigued?
Rest up.



Feeling
complacent?
Impossible!



Complacency Feels Good

Complacency feels like:

- Confidence
- Comfort
- Cleverness
- Competence



Remember

All complacency manifests as a good or normal feeling.

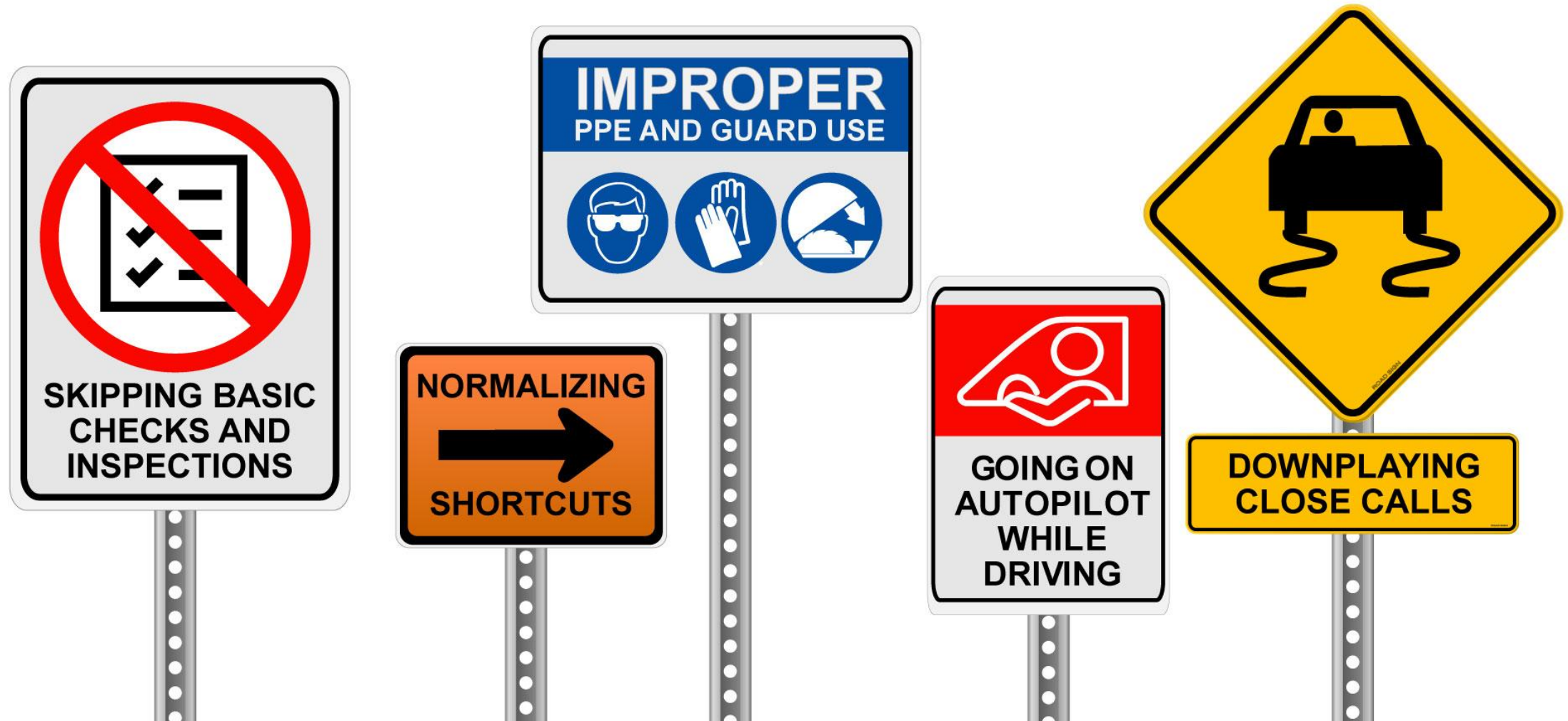
Not all good and normal feelings harbor complacency.



Question

What are some examples that you've seen of dangerous confidence, comfort, cleverness or competence?

Common Signs of Individual Complacency





The Science Behind Complacency



Complacency Looks Like Bad Behavior

But...

- Autopilot is a natural brain process
- We use it to conserve mental energy
- Some tasks do not require conscious thought

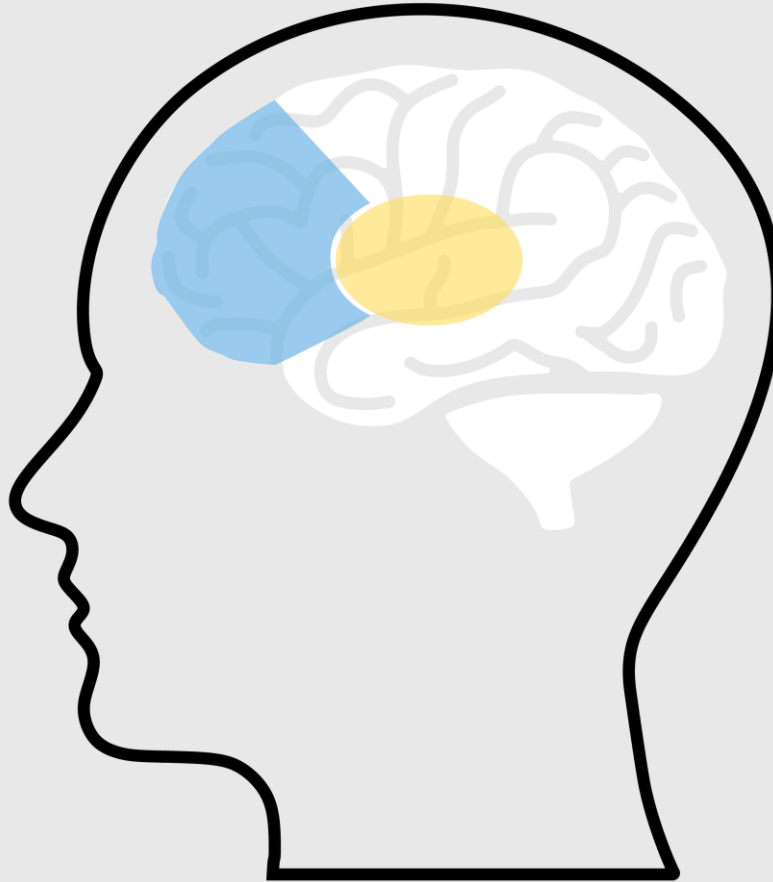
Complacency Involves Two Parts of the Brain

Prefrontal Cortex

- Focus
- Detail
- Learning
- High risk awareness

Striatum

(Autopilot and habits)



Complacency Level



High

Moderate

Low

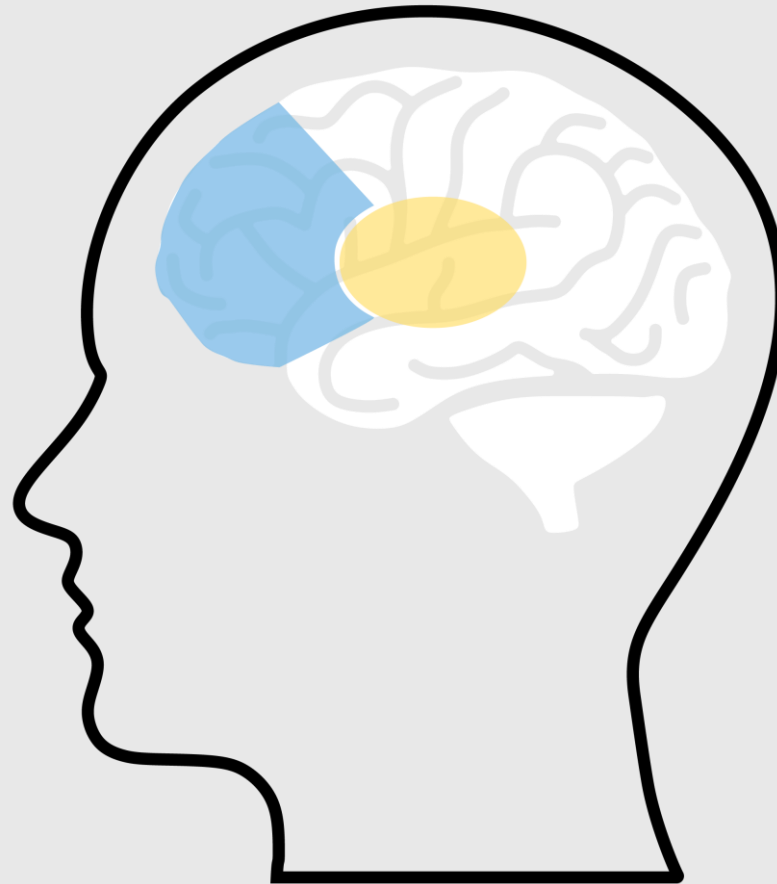
New Tasks

Prefrontal Cortex:

- Focused on details
- Consuming energy
- Keeping us safe

Striatum:

- Automating familiar tasks so we can focus on the new task



Complacency Level



Low

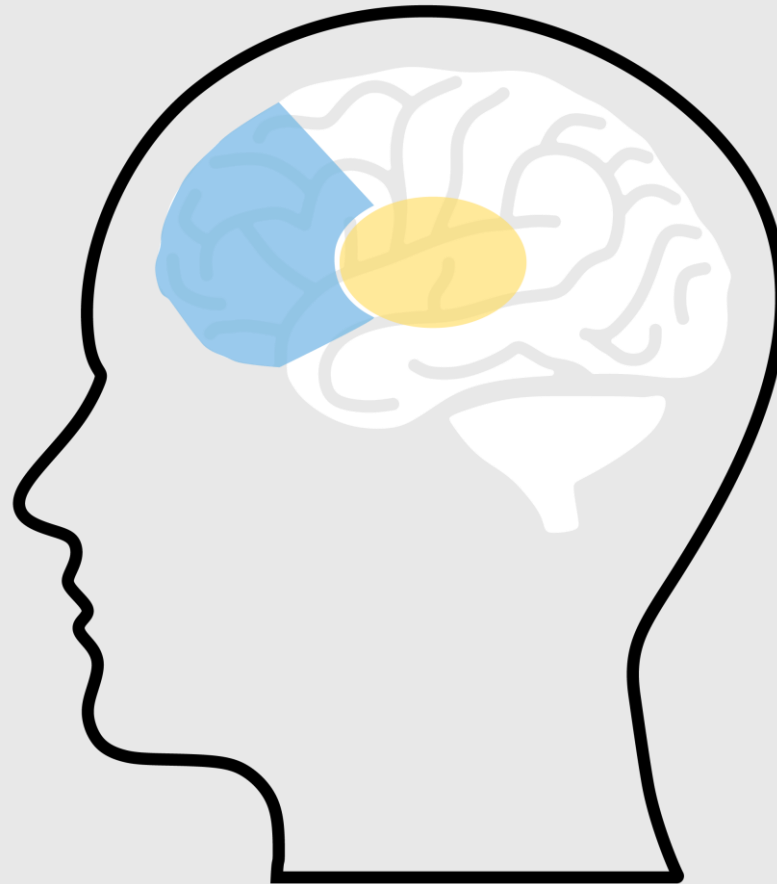
Getting Comfortable

Prefrontal Cortex:

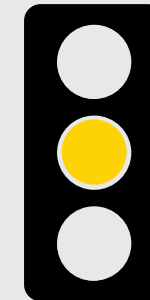
- Focusing on the difficult parts

Striatum:

- Automating the familiar parts



Complacency Level



Moderate

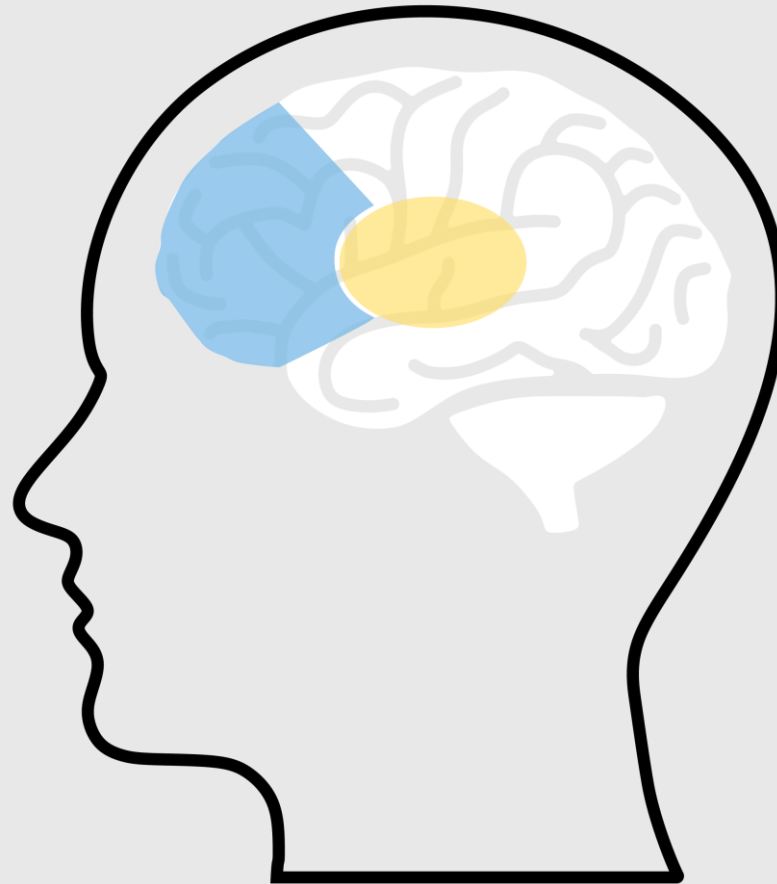
Familiar and Habitual

Prefrontal Cortex:

- Going through the motions
- Focusing on new things

Striatum:

- Fully automated task
- Relying on habits

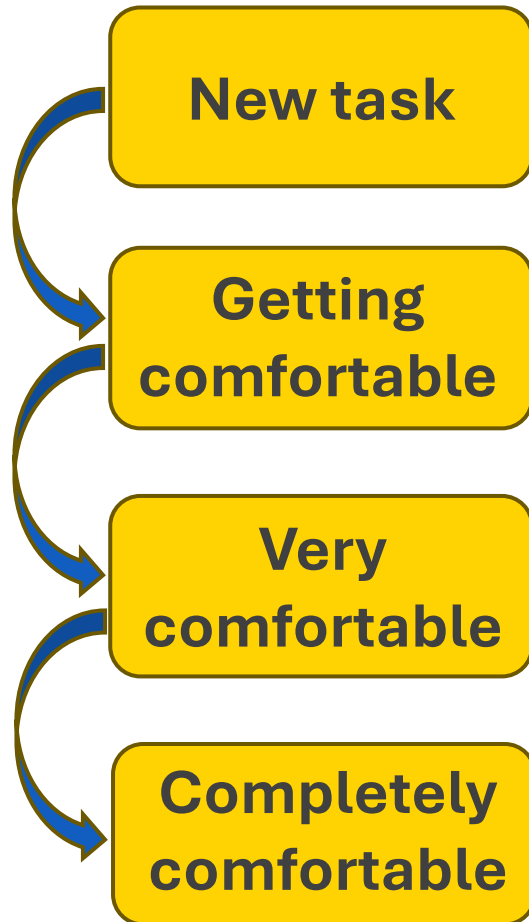


Complacency Level



High

Channeling Complacency



Low complacency, high attention.

- Always holding the railing while descending stairs.
- Always wearing situationally appropriate footwear.

Some steps are skipped, attention loosens.

- Often holding the railing while descending stairs.
- Usually wearing situationally appropriate footwear.

More shortcuts, higher speeds, less perception of risk.

- Occasionally holding the railing while descending stairs.
- Wearing footwear that feels “safe enough.”

Full autopilot; little memory of performing task.

- Only holding the railing when stairs feel particularly unsafe.
- Never considering how footwear affects stair safety.



Complacency is the result of everything working out over a long period of time without a critical eye for safety.



Habit Building for Individuals

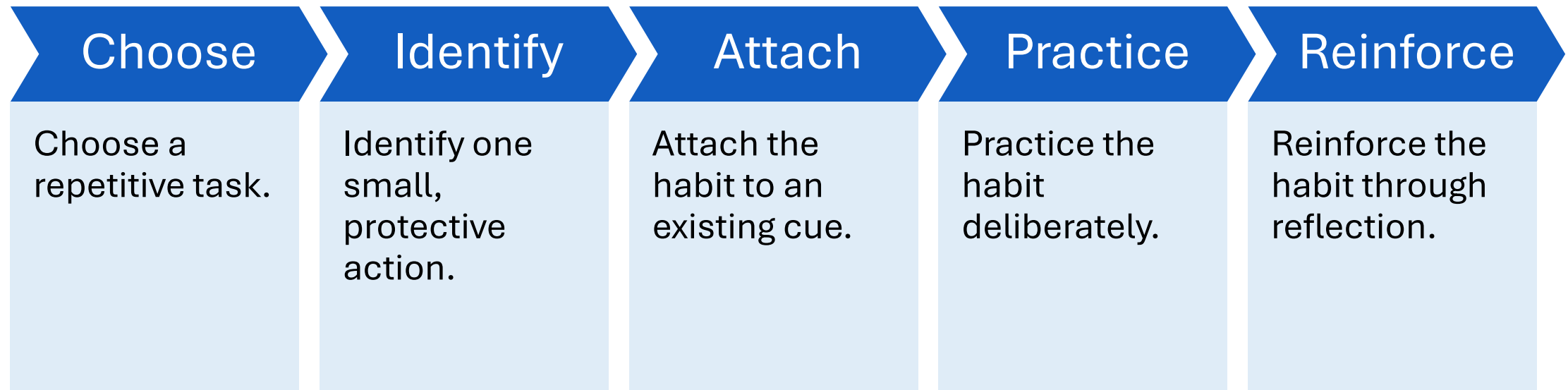
- Hacking complacency in the name of safety.



The Power of Habit

- Familiarity causes our minds to drift.
- When our mind drifts habits take over.
- Habits can be good or habits can be bad.
- Building a good safety habit is the best defense against complacency.

How to Build a Good Safety Habit



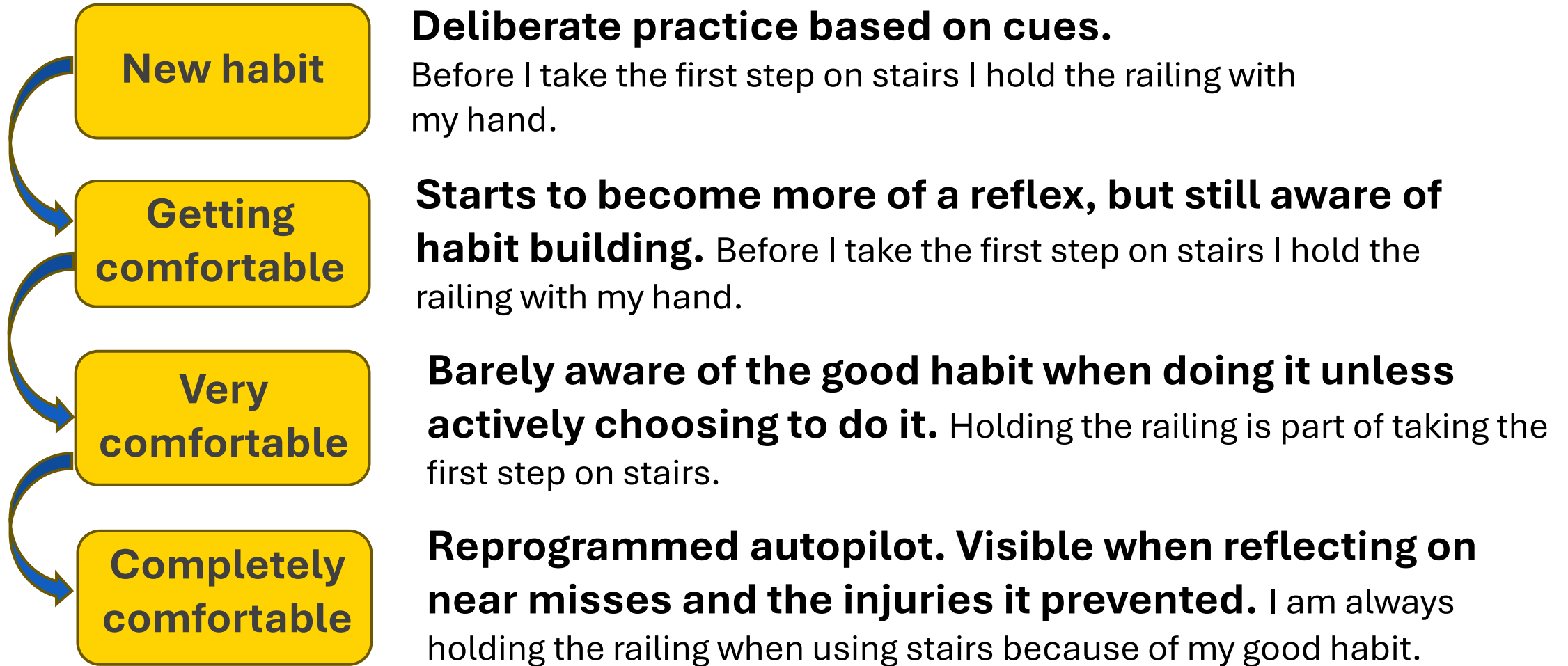


Questions

What is one small protective action that could have reduced my risk of injury?

What is a cue that I could use to prompt myself to perform that habit regularly?

Channeling a Good Habit





Organizational Complacency

The truth about being “safe enough.”

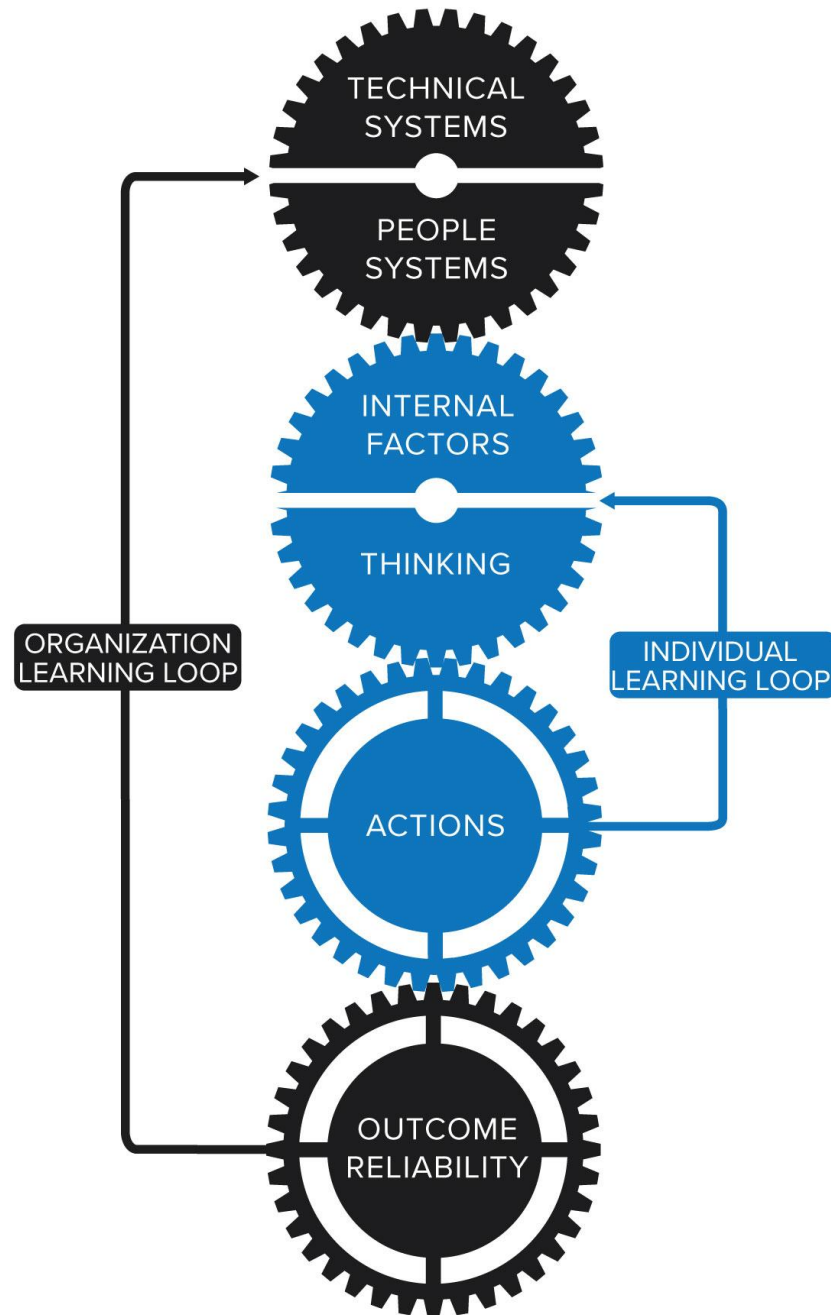


What is Organizational Complacency?

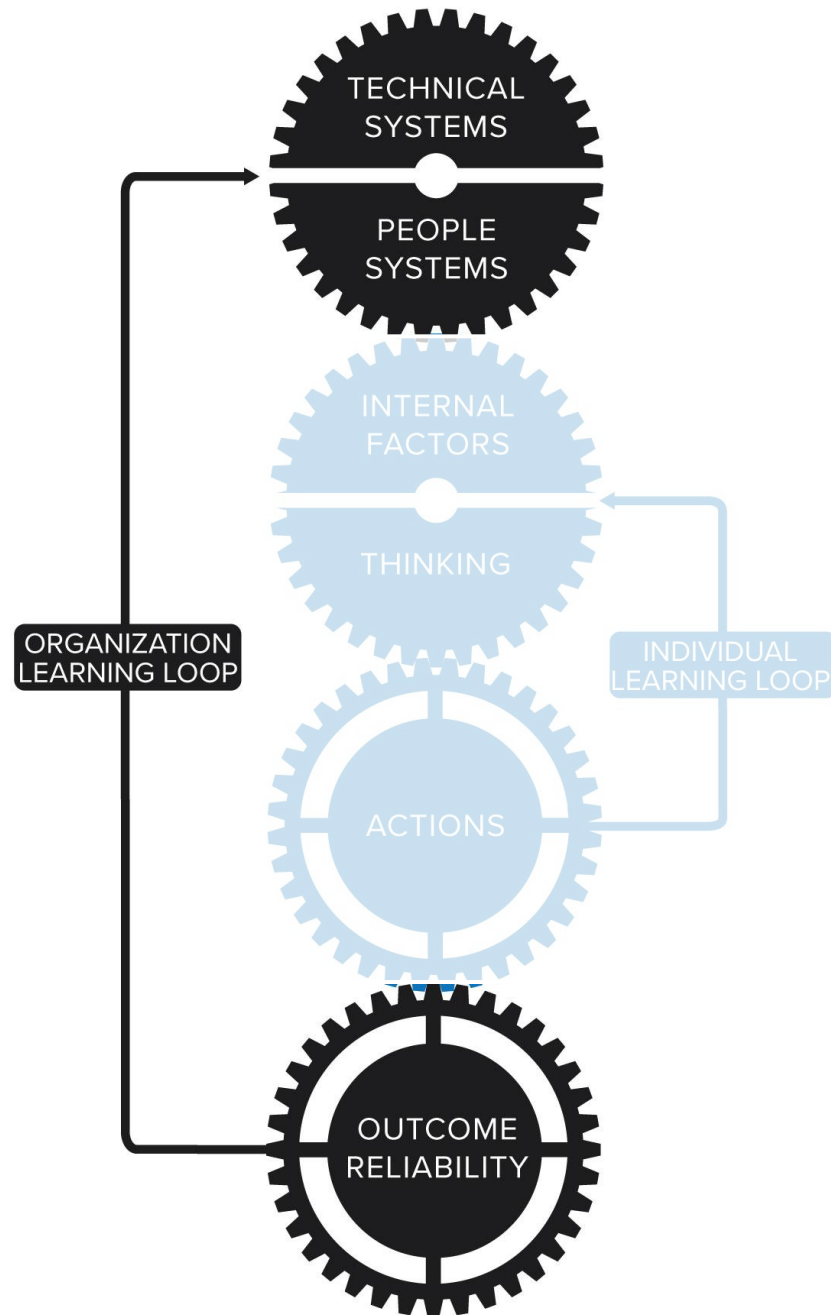
When “safe enough” becomes:
“How we do things around here.”



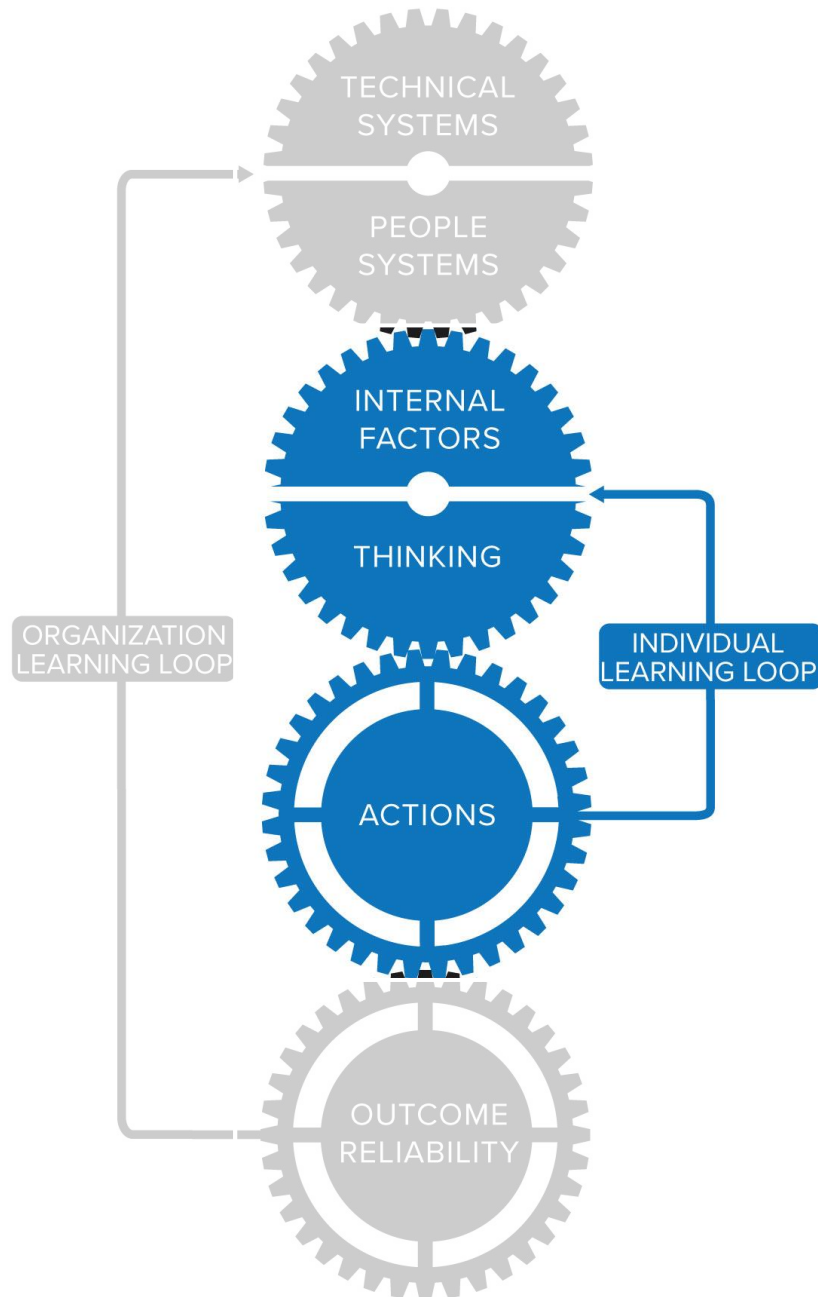
A Story About Organizational Complacency



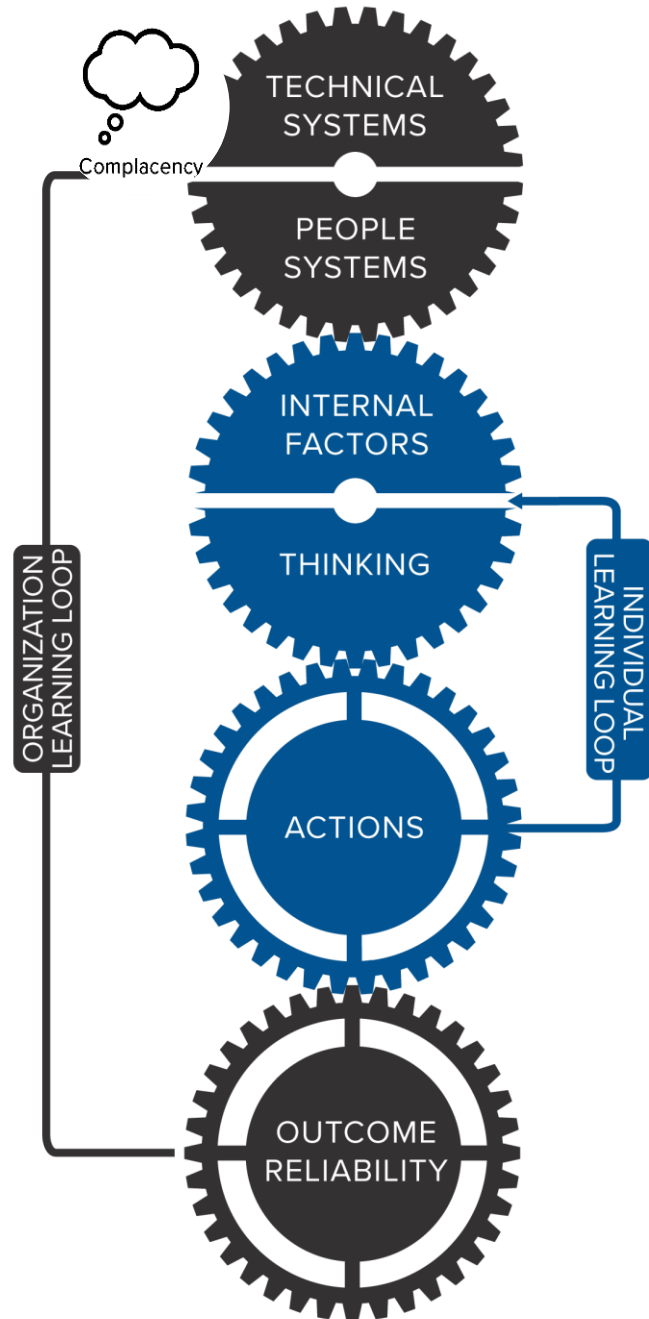
Systems, Individuals and Outcomes



Systems and Outcomes



Individuals



Complacent Systems Affect Everything

Symptoms of Organizational Complacency

Limited communication between workers, supervisors and leadership.

Low leadership visibility.

Just checking boxes.

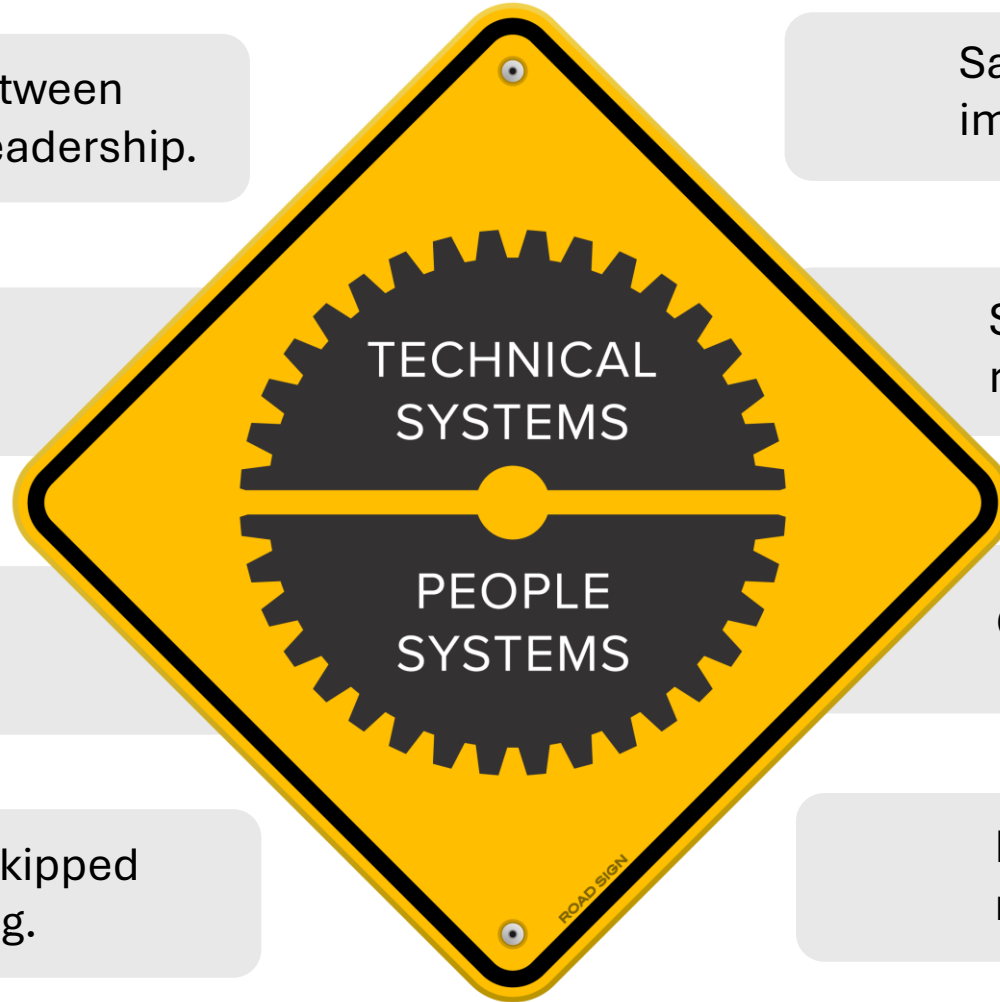
Maintenance delayed or skipped to keep production running.

Safety programs are only implemented after an incident.

Safety programs used as a remedy instead of prevention.

Outdated or generic training.

Inconsistent or non-existent near-miss reporting.





Fighting Organizational Complacency

- Communication against complacency.

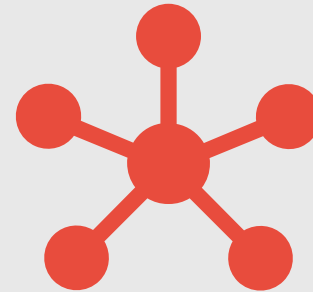
Communication Strategies



Talk



Look



Integrate

Communication Strategies



Discuss complacency in toolbox talks.



Encourage storytelling about complacency, close calls and injuries

Communication Strategies



Ask workers to walk you through repetitive tasks.



Keep track of how often leaders walk the floor.



Review training status regularly.

Communication Strategies



Include complacency on work permits and incident forms.



Encourage and support good habit building.



Track near misses with an eye for complacency.

A person wearing an orange safety jacket is holding a smartphone. The phone screen displays the text "You didn't Look both ways" in red. The background is a blurred street scene with a white car and traffic lights.

From Organizational Safety to 24/7

- Fighting organizational complacency promotes no-blame culture.
- Talking about complacency helps individuals see it 24/7.
- A culture of communication is a culture of engagement.



Human Factors Training as a First Step

Human factors training provides:

- Common language to talk about complacency
- Portable tools to find and address complacency 24/7
- Mutual understanding of complacency's dangers

Staying Vigilant

Complacency always comes back.





Thinking Long Term

When we address complacency, we reset the risk.

After we reset the risk, complacency starts building again.

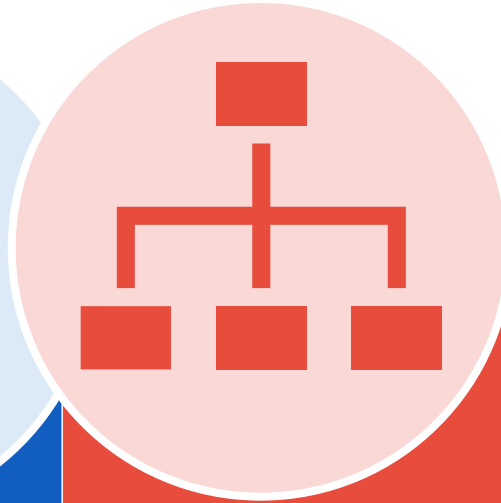
So we need to keep looking for the signs.

Defending Against Complacency



Individuals

- Watch others for risk patterns.
- Proactively develop good habits.



Organizations

- Keeping training fresh.
- Keeping communication flowing.
- Integrating anti-complacency culture



Wrapping It Up

Confidently protected from overconfidence.

Complacency Characteristics

- A natural brain process.
- Builds up with repeated positive outcomes.
- Hides in positive feelings like confidence and competence.



Warning Signs

- Close calls.
- Risk patterns in others.
- Symptoms of organizational complacency.



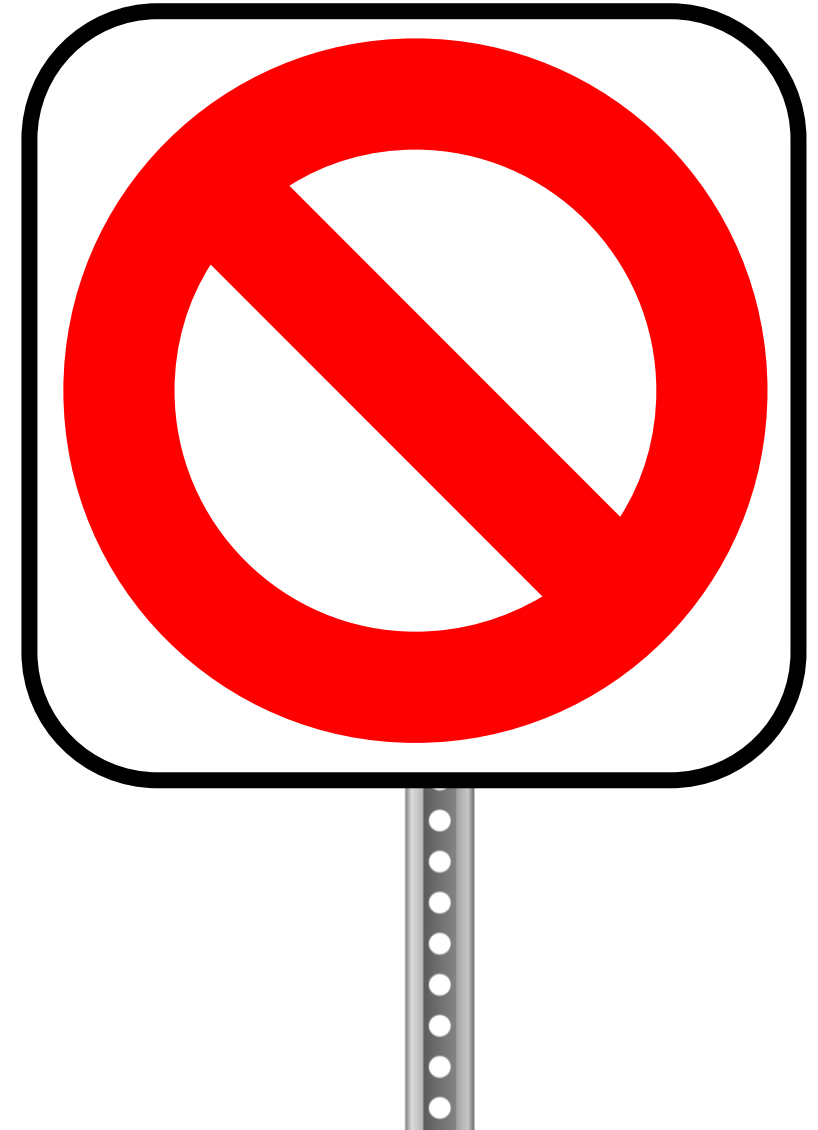
No-blame Strategies

For individuals:

- Identify a complacency-prone task
- Identify a repeatable protective action
- Attach it to an existing cue
- Practice it and reflect on it

For organizations:

- Talk about complacency
- Look for complacency
- Integrate anti-complacency measures





safestart.com/complacency-session/

Scan the QR code to learn more about complacency, the invisible human factor, and access a copy of today's presentation.

Questions?

Contact Today's Presenter
Rhonda Piggee Johnson
rhonda@safestart.com

