**Are you a zipper pull?**

A zipper is a very simple but important device. The design we use today, is based on interlocking teeth, and was invented by Swedish scientist Gideon Sundback, in 1913 and patented as the "*Hookless* *Fastener*". The slider operated by hand, moves along the rows of teeth. Inside the slider is a **Y**-shaped channel that meshes together or separates the opposing rows of teeth, depending on the direction of the slider's movement.

Zippers form a strong yet flexible bond between two objects that at times need to join forces but can come apart without damaging either side. I wish to make an analogy to our work as safety practitioners in a workplace. I propose that this analogy works on several levels.

Sometimes management balks at the expense of safety activities because the Return-on-Investment, (ROI) may be difficult to quantify. Sometimes workers feel that safety activities infringe on their personal freedoms. As safety practitioners we want to mesh these two apparently opposing forces into a strong and flexible collaborative bond. Each side comes with strong opinions and sometimes we find ourselves in the middle bearing the “bite” from both sides. Yet, if we skillfully **move** the process forward and guide the meshing we can keep the fabric of our safety culture together. It may be a hard ***pull*** but we must steer the two sides into a working relationship.

The slider is “Why” shaped but cannot do its job unless it is in motion. A zipper pull is a small but vital piece of the apparatus and without it being fastened to the slider, the zipper does not function. No one thinks of the importance of the Zipper unless there is a gap, then everyone notices. A gap in our programs often gets noticed only when an injury occurs. When the fabric of our organization is torn asunder by a tragedy, someone has to step up and guide the organization forward to heal the pain and bring all sides back into a working relationship.

We as safety practitioners must be prepared to bridge the gap. We must move the organization forward by bringing all parties together and mending the hurt, not finding fault. We must have the wisdom to know which way to move and the tenacity to keep pulling. Moving the pull is a hands-on work and we must personally get a firm grip to assure that motion occurs. Management provides the power but they have to know when to pull, how hard and that the sides are aligned.

When a zipper pull tab does its job correctly it will disappear until the next time a need arrises. Zipper pull tabs are never flashy and often go unrecognized unless they are missing, then the whole garment is not serviceable. Next time you use a zipper, think what a wonderful invention Gideon made a century ago and how well it functions even in the dark and the harshest of environments. Use it as an illustration, that by joining forces we can together solve even difficult problems. Thank you.