

Mel Camilli

Speaker Profile



A moment. That's all it takes to change a life forever.

At 21 years old, Mel Camilli had every reason to enjoy life: a well-paying job as a logger, a girlfriend, and hopes for taking over a family forestry business in the future. But in a split second, his world changed. While doing a routine task at work, he was trapped by a 20 ton piece of machinery, crushing his legs beyond repair. Mel speaks from his own experience to motivate young workers about the importance of workplace health and safety.

For two days after this accident, Mel wasn't expected to live. And after waking up from a morphine coma seven weeks later to discover his right leg had been amputated, Mel didn't know if he *wanted* to live.

When he decided to try to accept his physical limitations, Mel decided not to look too far into the future. "I knew there were things I would never do, things I would have to learn to do all over again. I resigned myself to never having a girlfriend or a wife. Who'd want to be with a guy like me?"

Instead of dating, playing sports, traveling, or any of the usual things his friends were doing, Mel was learning how to live each day. Unable to bend his left leg at the hip since the accident, he used a "Wheelchair-stretcher," which allowed him to move around the hospital, but forced him to lie flat because of his leg. After a year of using the stretcher, he felt it would be impossible to fit into society with the device. It was too awkward for everyday things like shopping, going to work, or just going out. So Mel made another tough decision: to have his remaining leg amputated in order to be able to use a regular wheelchair.

For another year and a half, Mel stayed in a rehabilitation centre, learning how to adapt once again. He had to learn the basics, like getting dressed, moving in and out of his wheelchair, even brushing his teeth in a wheelchair. While the days of rehabilitation activities were tough, the lonely evenings and weekends were almost as difficult.

His chance to adapt back into society came when a friend was leaving her wheelchair-accessible apartment in Vancouver, and Mel moved right in. With the new freedom came the decision to take on some new responsibilities, become involved in the community, and make new friends.

He found new outlets for physical activity – wheelchair basketball and hockey and he started coaching. Not the type to stay still for long, Mel also took computer training and is now working for WorkSafeBC. A custom-designed van and his own house keep him independent and active.

Mel isn't alone in his challenges. Every working day an average of 46 young workers are injured on the job in British Columbia. WorkSafeBC and Mel want young workers to realize that workplace accidents can happen in an instant. And the effects can last forever. He encourages youth to be aware of workplace hazards, to know their rights and responsibilities, and to stay safe and healthy on the job.

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