



Announcer

It's time for the *IHSA Safety Podcast*.

Enzo Garritano:

Welcome to *IHSA Safety Podcast*. We're joined today by CPO or Chief Prevention Officer of Ontario Ron Kelusky. And I want to welcome Ron for joining us on this podcast today, and talk about maybe your last three and a half years. And before we even start, I want to say congratulations on that term that you've had over the last three and a half years, as Ron has announced his retirement coming up in September 30. So, again, welcome, Ron.

Ron Kelusky:

Thank you, Enzo.

Enzo Garritano:

Appreciate you joining us, Ron. And today, we're going to talk about a couple of things here, if I can. And maybe starting with where you came from. And for those who didn't know, Ron has been, again, the Chief Prevention Officer. Our second chief prevention officer for the last three and a half years, taking this office in March of 2018. But before that, Ron was the CEO of Public Services Health and Safety Association, a sister association of IHSA. So, I wanted to look, key in a little bit on that and your past experience, Ron. And maybe how that has contributed to your position as chief prevention officer.

Ron Kelusky:

Well, thanks, Enzo. Yes. Actually, to be honest with you, health and safety was not one of my career choices over the past 45 years. I kind of slipped into it, if you will. Although, I have been very much involved in a number of careers where health and safety was very important, whether that be my tenure as the head of the ambulance service in Toronto or paramedic service. Moving from there, March of Dimes, with about 1,500 people that were engaged in community support and home care. Coincidentally enough, when I was with the private sector, I was with a technology startup called GestureTek. And we were using immersive technology. And it was very much geared towards the disability market. So, involved very heavily with that. And then, of course, with the Red Cross, not only with the international work that we were doing, but also domestically with 3,000 home care employees.

So, health and safety was always top of mind. And then I was recruited. Louise Logan, who was the CEO of Public Service Health and Safety had moved on. And I received a call from a recruiter that said, "I think you'd be really interested in this position with PSHSA." So, I applied for it and I got the job. And that was really the start of really getting involved in the health and safety industry. And coincidentally, though, in 2012 when I was with the Red Cross, we were very much involved with injury prevention from a first aid point of view. And we also had other programs that we're teaching. I made an appointment and actually met with George Gritzotis within his first month of being on the job. And I always thought it was a little bit coincidental that ultimately I ended up getting his position.

But when I was with PSHSA, it was an opportunity to continue on the really good work that had been done with this amalgamation and bringing together the three organizations similar to IHSA, with the utility and construction sector coming together. It was the education municipal and healthcare sectors came together to create PSHSA. So, really carrying on with that integration process. And looking at some of the evolving changes with not only technology, the use of eLearning. But also trying to create a presence within those sectors to start dealing with some of the critical issues that were going on, particularly violence in healthcare and mental health with public safety organizations.

Enzo Garritano:

That's an interesting take there, because as you saw, as you just mentioned, you're the second Chief Prevention Officer. So, having seen our first CPO, George Gritzotis, work for about five years, I think it was in his tenure. And you coming from the sectors that are dealing with topics that are really pertinent to everyone in Ontario, the sectors that we serve at construction, transportation and utilities, mental health and occupational disease, and then things like that, and harassment and violence. So, how does that prepared you? You saw the previous five years of the CPO. You've been very experienced and immersed in the healthcare and all those sectors with regards to those topics. So, how did that prepare you for your upcoming role as the chief prevention officer and how do you think you've moved those chains forward in Ontario?

Ron Kelusky:

I used to spend a lot of time with George, not only as him being the CPO, a position within the ministry of then labor, but also within the politics, and working with the various associations and other stakeholders. And I think some of the critical insights that I found is... and we've actually lived through it, becoming a new ministry. Going from Ministry of Labour, where it was largely the inspectorate which was the largest component of the Ministry of Labour. Policy prevention and labour relations solutions, that was the whole ministry as a whole. And then moving to the larger one with Employment Ontario, and immigration nomination, and really becoming a five-times-greater-sized ministry. What I really perceived going into this job was that there was a really bad... Not bad. But that's probably a poor choice of words. But the challenge of integrating prevention into the then Ministry of Labour really hadn't been successful.

It was very still focused on the inspection side. And of course, you had the occupational health and safety branch, which was by virtue of its name, was almost like a competition with the prevention office. And really that integration really occurred in a more fuller sense when we started to create the new ministry with the other new divisions that came in. So, I think starting anything, you're a trailblazer. I mean, George did that trailblazing, like a pioneer going out west. A few of them didn't make it. And a lot of them had the holes and scars to show once they got there. And I think that the difference is George laid the foundation. And it's a lot easier for the next guy.

Now, I'd have to say having a change of government, we had a minister with Minister Flynn, who had been the labour minister for almost three years. So, there was a lot of stability in that relationship. So, then having a change of government. The first year of the new government was a challenge as they were trying to get their feet wet on where they wanted to go. And then that changed again when they started to look at, okay, maybe we want to take a different course. And that's been actually good for

prevention and continues under the current minister, who's again moving into his third year as well, which has brought stability to health and safety.

Enzo Garritano:

Right. A big advocate for, I know in our case, is working for the trades and working for opening up opportunities for youth. That's a fantastic thing. But again, we want to make sure that the youth are always in the best position from a health and safety perspective. And as we look at that, so that's great to hear that the integration of the ministries, our minister of labor with training skills development has worked out well. From a health and safety perspective, obviously, COVID threw a big curve ball into everything after your second year. But how do you think moving forward the success has been in regards to dealing with those youth, dealing with the young people, dealing with people who are coming in with opportunity, whether it's new to Canada or otherwise? How do you think Ontario's fared as far as trying to improve their health and safety outcomes during your tenure?

Ron Kelusky:

Clearly, it depends on what you're measuring. And if we measure were we successful in reducing subsets like fatalities, as an example, that we still haven't quite got to the point where we have a flat curve that's hitting in a downward position. That's still kind of pumpkin face. We celebrate a really good year and then next year it's bad. And then the next year, it may be less bad. So, we still have some areas of improvement there. And the same with critical injuries. However, there have been some real positive spots. And I think it's, again, foundational work that we're doing in the area of the root cause analysis, starting to understand why injuries are occurring. This focus on a more epidemiological approach to health and safety.

So, as I use the parallel, when you go to your doctor, what the doctor does to you in terms of procedures, all founded on research with predictable outcomes. We need to work towards that in health and safety, so that as the Auditor General said, we may be the safest jurisdiction in Canada, but we still can't figure out why. Well, there's good work being done. I think moving forward, where we can look at what we do. And I think the groundwork is being laid with that, whether it's through the strategy or whether it's through people recognizing the value of health and safety.

When we look at construction, we can look at the per capita investment, which is second only to mining, which is a high risk thing. We see the value that has come out of COVID with the collaboration that's taken place with the big major associations, like RESCON, like OGCA, like COCA [Council of Ontario Construction Associations] and BILD [Building Industry and Land Development Association], where we work collaboratively with you as the health and safety expert for construction, in really coming through a real challenging situation that has been groundbreaking in many ways that will to a new future for health and safety.

Enzo Garritano:

And that's one of the points I think we wanted to chat about today about is stakeholder input and stakeholder engagement. I know that you've been through your tenure. And again, kudos to you. You've been extremely approachable with all sectors. And having that broad engagement level with them has collected them, brought them in. And we're getting good solutions and good feedback from the

industry. Like I said, I don't think you've ever missed an appearance or an interview or meeting request. So, can you talk a little bit about that value of the stakeholder input? Because again, without it, we're kind of wandering in the dark. Having that stakeholder input really provides us with clarity in regards to what's touching base with them, what's making sense, what's not making sense. So, a little bit on that in regards to the success of health and safety outcomes today and tomorrow, including also maybe the Prevention Council and the renewal at the Prevention Council.

Ron Kelusky:

Well, funny enough, a lot of my history with organizations have been what I would characterize as turnarounds. And I've fallen into some jobs where the position and the organization was in jeopardy, whether it was funding, whether it was privatization, whether it was just a change in attitude towards the organization. And I came up with a sort of a saying going into it, make them want to miss you before you're gone. And part of that is ensuring that the crowd behind you in support of you is bigger than the crowd in front of you that's not supporting you. And really, the importance of stakeholder engagement to get not only a profile, but also to engage people, to see the value of what you're peddling or what you're trying to sell, or what you are doing. And really, the ground up approach is the best way to do it.

If we don't have the support of the people that we are there to serve. When those critical issues come along, like funding reductions or like a change in attitude, or a desire to move more into an alternative model. If you don't have that backing, you really don't have the strength to be able to deal with that because you're really only one person. And I've always taken that attitude. So, it didn't matter who it was that would call, I would make the time. And I saw the value of engaging with associations. We saw that when we were working with OGCA [Ontario General Contractors Association], and COR®, and moving to Supporting Ontario's Safe Employers program. We knew that there was a whole cadre of people that had a different opinion about COR® versus ISO, but working with those stakeholders we knew that they had a lot of influence and they made their position known.

And it was an opportunity to, in fact, strengthen the Supporting Ontario's Safe Employer program by working with those stakeholders, working with you, understanding the program more than just on the surface. And I think that many other opportunities existed with other associations to get in there. So, it was really, how do we increase the profile of prevention? You have to get out there. I also believe in you don't invite everybody to your office. You go out to their office, because that brings more sincerity and legitimacy to the position. I didn't want to be seen as just another bureaucrat inconvenienced by travel.

Enzo Garritano:

Right. Even during these tough times, again, whether it was virtual or otherwise, again, we want to thank you for that time you provided, and clarity and engagement in conversation because that's how we get to solutions. And like you said, there are many solutions out there. It's not about one-way ticket to preventing injuries and illnesses. There's a number of ways, and it has to be catered to both the sectors, as well as the risk, as you mentioned. The risk is always an important piece, whether it's higher risk or decreased risk, but those are always important elements to consider in prevention.

Announcer

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