



# Safety's Traditions



We arrive at this season after a year of monetary stress and business transitions. Nations have been challenged by the

dynamics around energy and commodities prices. Organizations have made decisions defined by resource constraints. Families have not been spared.

When we finally close our books on the 12 months just passed, we may feel relieved for having done with recent difficulties. Or, we may hold fear for what lies ahead. In the midst of reckoning with financial strain, our goals, at work and home, may shift to serve immediate needs. And, we may reconsider past necessities as optional. Maintenance on the job may be taken off the schedule. Safety purchases for projects may go from buy to hold. Repairs at home may be cancelled.

Transcontinental economic systems seem to function outside of the span of human control. Most remarkable perhaps in our data-dense moment is how uncertainty pervades our work and personal lives, just as it did for those in historic epochs. Who is really in charge? Reaching back to the earliest cultures, people like us have struggled with this question.

Through the art of storytelling, myths shaped the thoughts shared by ancient humans about their natural world. Mythology in part became the verbal tradition that offered means for rationalizing the unrecognizable forces surrounding births, deaths, strengths, weaknesses, war, peace, success, or failure. Only much later did science, engineering, and medicine rise in influence.

Today information flows at electron speed. Massive enterprises reside in small buildings. Business travelers chase the sun across time zones, working with currencies in their spreadsheets, not their suitcases. Materials alter their properties, from macro- to micro-, and then, to nanoscales. Knowledge is less formed than does the vapor from warm water on a cool day. Yet we advance.

So, as our year-end accounts settle, let's reconcile with the fact that the sum of our daily actions collectively

ensures security, prevents injury, and spares waste. The examples are simple and real. If we maintain a breaker, the device is more likely to perform as

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intended during a fault condition that might cause a fire. If we purchase a set of insulated tools, the screwdriver we hold is less likely to conduct a shock to our hand when it accidentally slips over energized surfaces. If we repair a loose faucet, water is less likely to be found where a slip or fall might occur.

While our budgets may be threatened, our ability to shape the present and future has never been greater. There is not another hour in human history when we each by choice could do more than now. The 21st century's signature is rendered by individuals—not an invisible hand. Celebrating the past and anticipating the future, our safety traditions can be more than a myth.

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