

## 1. It Happened to Me

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It happened to me, too. It happened to all of us, a long time ago. We felt the same way that you do today. It is difficult. It is a deep emotional wound. And it lasts a long time. I know because I was one of the Control Room Operators during the Three Mile Island Accident in 1979.

When I speak to people about the accident, as I have in meetings all over the world, it still stirs my emotions. I stammer, and sweat and it is like it is happening again, even 32 years later.

The accident resulted in damage to the plant, evacuations from the nearby towns, other nuclear plants were shutdown and construction of new plants was cancelled. I felt as though I had failed and caused the public to fear the technology that I had trusted.

We had to learn how to deal with highly contaminated water in the basements of our buildings. We had to install new pumps, tanks, filters and piping to transport and store the accident waste.

Every new day brought more bad news, media attention, criticism and a new investigation from a government or environmental group. I spent six years in various interrogations, interviews, court appearances and depositions. There were inquiries and demands from dozens of investigations.

Life was different after the accident. It is as if my life is divided into two parts. What happened before the accident, and what happened after the accident. The date of the accident marks both an end and a beginning.

In the first few months after the accident, it was difficult to understand the scope, the impact, and the repercussions that were echoing around the world. After a year, the turmoil was still controlling my life. After two years, we were focused on clean-up. After three years we were beginning to understand the scope of the clean-up. After 6 years, our other unit was able meet all of the new requirements to re-start. After 10 years the clean-up was complete. After 12 years the unit was placed in long term storage, and now it is a grim reminder of the accident.

Sometimes I get the opportunity to take people to the TMI2 to show them the empty turbine hall and the stripped control room. I show it to operators, managers, government and oversight organizations; all those who need to be reminded; all those who could influence an event that might become another accident. I remind them of why it is important to be vigilant, to challenge assumptions, to demand good procedures and to maintain equipment in best condition.

I also remind them that this accident was caused

by human error. Not just operator error, not just mechanical failures and instrument failures. It was also caused by errors in decisions made many years before the accident. Decisions about what limits would be needed; what safety barriers would be needed. How big. How long. How high. How strong.

Somebody made those decisions and came up short. They assumed that if an accident happened it would be within certain bounds. They were wrong.

And so, what enables me to survive each day without being overwhelmed by guilt, sadness, regret and mourning is that it was not all my fault. It was not the operators, mechanics and technicians who could have faced the dragon alone and turned it away. It was an entire industry that assumed they understood the limits of failure. It was complacency. It was an attitude that said, "this is good enough."

That's what we learned. It is never good enough. There is no "good enough", there is only excellence. To be strived for. To be sought after, knowing at the outset that it is unreachable. Excellence is needed. In every corner and crevice. In every action and word. No hiding. No deception. Full disclosure. Complete cooperation. Natural accountability.

In the following months and years, that is what we all need to do. That is what we all need to see our leaders doing. That is what we need to be involved in. Do the work. Answer the questions. Disclose the results. Fix it.

It is difficult. Almost unbearably difficult. But we face the problem, we learn from it and we move on. We get better.

I assure you. We get better.

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