

Dedicated But at What Cost: The Case of an Overexerted Employee

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HRM 3400

November 22, 2022

Keywords: overexertion, pushing carts, standards

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Background of the Organization

Jake Hall has been employed for about a year at Produce & Co. Produce & Co is a warehouse that sells various products such as home items, furniture, office supplies, groceries, outdoor accessories, etc. Produce & Co. is a large chain that is always busy and has a lot of staff in different departments. Jake works in the front-end department as a lot assistant. He occasionally works in the tire center as well.

Jake works 40-hour work weeks, typically 8 hours a day. There are six other people with him in the lot department, however, each shift has about 4-5 people. Jake's main task is bringing in the carts from the corrals to the vestibule in the front entrance of Produce & Co. This includes gathering carts from the corral with a rope, then pushing them through the parking lot into the store. The other daily activities include filling propane tanks, cleaning the lot, and emptying the garbage bins. The main activity is managing the carts.

The Challenge for Jake Hall

The challenge Jake faces with this job is quite simply overexertion. Pushing too hard or exerting the body past its limit can result in serious health issues. Jake shares "We are instructed to push about 6-8 carts every 2-4 minutes, and doing that, fast paced on an average 8-hour shift is physically draining on my body." There is not really any downtime or quiet moments in the lot. Jake is constantly pushing or gathering carts. This is a significant challenge because of the strain that is being placed on his body from constant maneuvering. This worries Jake because as his body is wearing down, it is getting harder to perform his job up to the standards and expectations of his managers/supervisors.

Employee and Management Perspectives

Jake's supervisor, Aaron, has told Jake and the other lot assistants that the requirement of pushing 6-8 carts every 2-4 minutes is not optional. Aaron is strict about this, and he does not approve of pushing less than the standard. Jake shared that if an employee pushes more than the regular 6-8, nothing happens. That employee is not praised for it but is not told to stop either. In certain weather conditions such as snow, wind, or rain, it is even more of a challenge to keep up

with the standards. Sometimes the lot assistants help carry out large items that the customers cannot handle. For example, one of the BBQ's at Produce & Co. weighs approximately four hundred pounds. It would take a few hands to assist with this. Aaron has previously told the customers that it is no problem for the staff to assist. Jake shares there are risks that come with the job itself, but there is serious strain being put on him, and he does not feel that his supervisors are on his side. He wishes there were a way for him not to feel as worn out as he does after every shift.

On the other hand, Aaron is trying to do his job as well. He follows the rules and ensures Jake is pushing the standard number of carts. There does not seem to be an issue in his perspective because Jake is completing his job up to expectations. It is hard to see all the physical symptoms of overexertion that Jake is experiencing. Sometimes Aaron can see that Jake starts to slow down towards the end of his shift. He is unsure what to do.

A Specific Incident

Jake experienced this safety concern in a more recent incident. He had a closing shift. Typically, there are four people closing. This time, he was the only one as others called in. The situation Jake was put in came with elevated expectations to complete all the tasks and duties associated with closing the lot. The closing tasks include emptying the corrals, changing garbage, sweeping, and locking the doors. Jake shared, "Doing this by myself created more challenges. I had to push a bit more than normal. I was tired and felt beat down." Jake shared there was not anyone else able to assist him close the lot. He had to work overtime to make sure everything was completed. Aaron was not impressed with the overtime as he plans the schedule on a budget, but he was aware Jake was the only one closing and lacked help. Jake wants to be able to work in better conditions without overexertion, while Aaron is unsure of how to help or change the way the lot is organized.

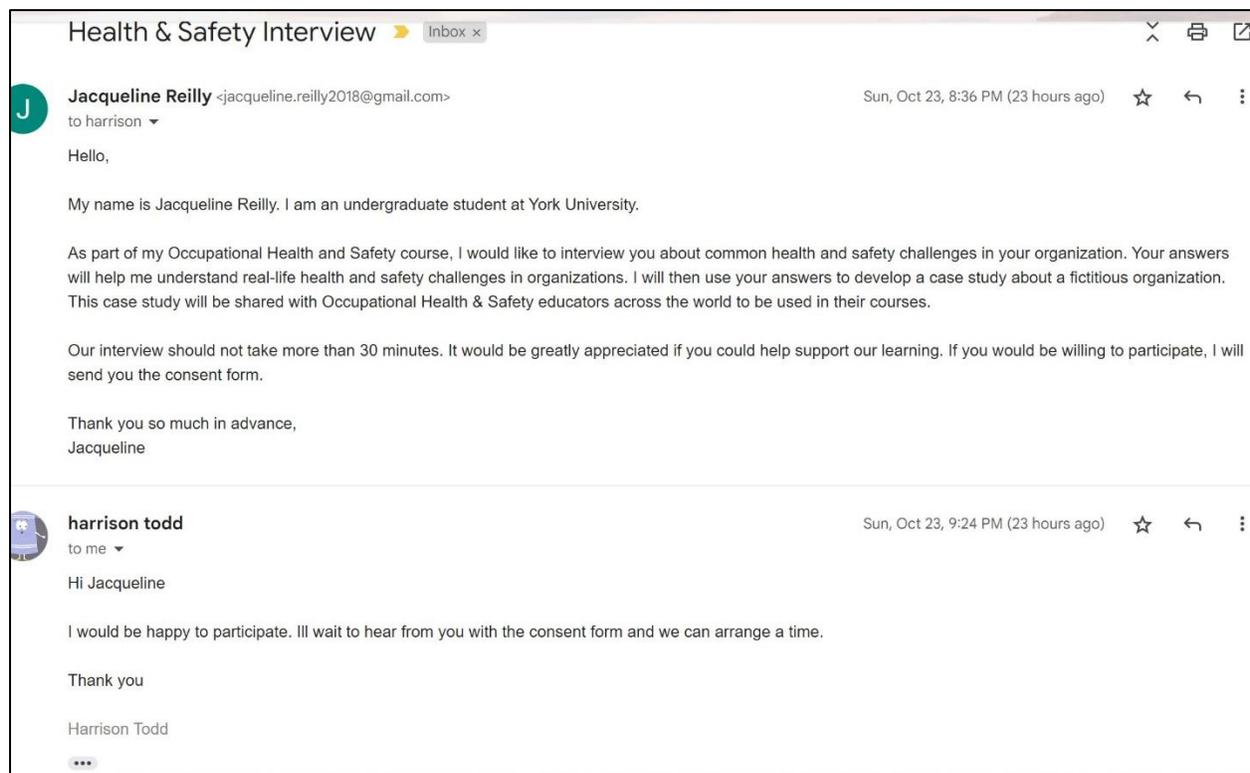
Discussion Questions

1. If you were in Aaron's position, what would you do to make Jake feel that you are working with him and not against him?
2. Is there a way to read the risks that the employees agree to when they sign the contract for their position with Produce & Co.? If so, how could this help both parties be in a better position?

3. Do you think other employees that have the same job/tasks as Jake feel the same way? Is there a way that they could all communicate their concerns?
4. Are there any accommodations that could be offered to Jake if he proves how much strain is being put on him?
5. What do you think is the right thing to do to solve overexertion? Does Jake have valid reasons to feel this way about his position at Produce & Co.?

Appendix A: Invitation

This shows the invitation sent for consent of the interview. The interviewee replied giving permission to participate in the interview.



Appendix B: Interview Questions

The following questions were asked in the interview:

1. Can we start with getting to know you? What kind of organization do you work for? What is your role? How long have you been in this organization/role?
2. Can you please provide more details about your organization? (e.g., industry, size, daily activities etc.)
3. Can you tell me about a significant health and safety-related challenge you have been facing in this organization?
 - a. Why is this a significant problem?
 - b. What is the management's position in this challenge?
 - c. What is the employee's position in this challenge?
 - d. Why do you think this problem has a difficult solution?
4. Can you please talk about a specific incident when this problem was presented?
 - a. What was the situation?
 - b. What was your task?
 - c. What action was taken?
 - d. What were the results?
5. Is there anything else you would like to share?