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## Philippe Balzer

He has run businesses in the fields of structural analysis and public sector construction, organisations and change management, and innovation and technology transfer. He worked for the French national health insurance agency as a risk prevention advisor. He provides initial and ongoing training for many French universities. He is also involved in the preparation of standards and international recommendations.



## Pierre, Director of a Technical School who doesn't sleep well at night

Every day, Pierre faces the same challenge: training young students to work with dangerous machines without getting hurt. His strategy is clear—**anticipate to the greatest extent possible** <sup>(1)</sup>. Each trainer must submit the program for their practical work and written materials a month in advance. Everything is audited and discussed in meetings. Before the session begins, assistants are given time to correctly prepare the workspace and machinery in accordance with specifications. Their work is formally signed-off by the trainer in the presence of the first group of students who take any necessary remedial action. Then a second group of students signs-off their work in the presence of the trainer.

## Constant vigilance to improve risk anticipation

Each anomaly is reported and analysed. The most serious bring the

session to an immediate end. Pierre has a dashboard that shows the relevant indicators, and knows exactly how many anomalies are related to a mechanical fault, the wearing of non-compliant PPE, human actions, workstation ergonomics, etc.

He also knows exactly where and how anticipation has proved to be ineffective. Most of the time, he also knows why. Which means that his requests for continuous improvement in the preparation of practical sessions are always pertinent.

## André the multifaceted sports teacher

André is not the favourite teacher of his school's Director: 99% of accidents involving pupils take place in sports classes. He sees sport as a School of Life; he constantly pushes his students to their limits and encourages them to use both their body and their mind. "You have a heart murmur and can't run? Try brisk walking with a stick so that you learn how to control your heartbeat". His teaching experience, kindness and constant inventiveness have made him

## Expecting the unexpected is all part of the job manager

the darling of his students, who have nicknamed him "El loco".

André is known for his enthusiasm for backpacking trips, and he has gradually taken on the responsibility of organising the annual school outing. If the program and its organization are well oiled, "El loco" bases his success on a principle he acquired during 10 years of coaching rugby in his village: **"train us to cope with unexpected!"**.

## Develop individual and collective professionalism to deal with the unexpected

Before each trip, André identifies the "resources" that are needed to manage the unexpected. One is fluent in Spanish, OK, he's in charge! The three least academic boys (who are good at sport and everyone is scared of) are given the responsibility of rounding up the sheep. It's their job to "gather the flock" when it's time to get on the bus.

Most importantly, he develops collective ways to respond sensibly to situations that



cannot be predicted. His favourite game in the days before departure is: "What if ...?". "And if you have to win the 100m sprint, but you have to walk backwards holding hands with two people?" "What if..?", "What if..?".

Throughout the trip, André asks his colleagues to report the unexpected events of the day and how they were managed. Hidden talents are revealed, together with a lack of skills or the ability to adapt. "El loco" uses it all to push his troops to do better.

### Épilogue

An unexpected promotion means that Pierre finds himself appointed Director at André's school. After two years of ongoing strife, André begins to anticipate better. He makes explicit the rules that he used to implicitly apply to his students, and reduces the number of hazardous situations. The number of trips to the hospital falls by two-thirds. Despite a huge amount of initial collective frustration, everyone eventually agrees that the game is

worth the candle. School trips also become safer.

At the same time, Pierre realizes that by forcing his colleagues to focus on the strict application of safety rules and procedures, he is overlooking a lot of what is really happening in his high school.

He has been disregarding the ingenuity and experience of teachers who have to manage a multitude of situations that happen every day. Stories about broken machinery, broken tools, lack of supplies, late students, oil leaks, low temperatures or faulty lighting make up the day-to-day life of his colleagues. When he looks more closely, Pierre

discovers that **half of the high-risk situations are managed** using techniques developed by André—and decides that it is time to modify both his dashboard and his strategy.

Our thoughts on safety culture  
[www.icsi-eu.org](http://www.icsi-eu.org)

