

# ***I'll Find That Shortcut If It Takes Me All Day!***

By Ken Palmer

**A** shortcut generally is a good thing. It can be defined as a more direct route than the customary one, or as a means of saving time. My concern and frustration comes when people take a shortcut without taking the time to really learn the basics of a method. Often, people will have picked up bits and pieces of a new technique, and, without understanding the principles behind it or the limitations for using it, they immediately look for a shortcut to fit the situation. Unfortunately, without knowing the fundamentals of a given method, the outcome of using a shortcut could be unpredictable or even disastrous.

Some people spend too much time trying to figure out shortcuts rather than learning the accepted industry best practices and standard operating procedures. For example, I really hate sitting in traffic, and I've been known to say to my wife, "I'll find that shortcut if it takes me all day!" I can spend so much time looking for an alternate path that it ends up taking longer than I would have spent going the normal route.

Knowing and understanding the standard procedures allows for the versatility to apply various methods to a wide variety of situations. And, knowing the advantages and limitations of each method helps keep safety at the forefront.

The worst kinds of shortcuts are those that abandon or ignore safety standards. Examples include free climbing, body-thrusting unsecured, one-handing a chain saw, neglecting to use a second means of

tying in when using a chain saw in a tree, climbing alone, and not taking the time to use the proper PPE.

It often is said that experience is the best teacher. However, experience can be a very tough teacher, and tough lessons are sometimes learned at great expense. Isn't it smart to learn from others' experiences and expertise? Some lessons I would *definitely* prefer to learn from other people's experiences!

Our safety standards and best management practices are all based on the collective experience of veterans and innovators

please. Let me give an example to illustrate the potential hazards in shortcutting the training process.

In the past five years or so, many climbers have switched from a traditional tie-in system to using a split-tail. The advantages are clear: versatility afforded by the opportunity to use dual anchor points on the saddle, no need to untie the climbing hitch to recrotch, no need to cut worn sections from the climbing line, and so on. Yet, as this new piece of equipment and technique has been passed through the industry, some of the vital information and training that should accompany its introduction and use have been left out.

When we were using the traditional climbing system in which we tied our climbing hitch directly using the climbing line, the climbing hitch (usually a tautline hitch backed up with a figure-8 stopper knot) effectively backed up the knot used to attach the climbing line to the rope snap. Now, using a split-tail system, this attachment knot stands alone. This configuration obviously makes the knot chosen and the necessity for tying it correctly much more critical.

If using a carabiner, it's important that the knot or hitch cinch down on the connecting link

and that it be tied properly. You don't want it to roll. A bowline, for example, is not a good choice because it does not cinch down on the connecting link; it can roll around the connecting link, encouraging side loading of the connecting link (carabiner).

Another concern about the bowline involves its use as a dead-end knot; loading



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in our profession. These standards and practices have been developed to help ensure the safety of our workforce. Isn't it a bad idea to disregard them?

It seems to be a natural desire among people to cut to the chase, bypass the details, and get to the prize. It's indicative of our society today—just give me the *Cliff Notes*,

and unloading can loosen it. Yet thousands of climbers were taught to tie into their rope snaps using a bowline as part of the traditional climbing system and have extrapolated use of this knot to the split-tail system. The result can be fatal.

Three better choices for this attachment knot are the double or triple fisherman's loop, the anchor bend, or the buntline hitch. Each has its limitations and should be used in the appropriate application, yet each will cinch down in the connecting link.

The point is, we must teach the fundamental principles and the limitations when we introduce others to new equipment and

techniques. There is a great danger when people learn only a portion of what they need to know.

All of us who train professionally have a responsibility not to just "wow" people. We need to stop teaching only bits and pieces and take the time to teach thoroughly. But this responsibility extends to anyone who shares a new method with another worker. Everyone out there who has any experience in this field is setting an example to the less experienced, one way or the other—either good or bad. Often, in the learning process, it's the little things that are left out and people end up learning the hard way.

Shortcuts take many forms and, when carefully developed, can be a great savings in time. However, shortcuts that leave out essential steps or information can lead to significant losses, sometimes in more than just time. Safety must never be cut from any procedure or training process. The savings in time sometimes comes at too great a cost.

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