

## Life with the lions

Submitted by Kellie Mundell on Thu, 2016-03-31 10:32

I had the pleasure of playing at Dragon's Den the other day at the Birmingham NEC. My group of lions – judging innovative safety products in a “lair” at the Health and Safety Event – had eight presentations to assess and it was a horrible task.



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The semi-professional presenters were super slick and impressive, and the part-time presenters were endearing in their enthusiasm.

More importantly, they *all* had great products so I wanted them all to win. That said, in a way they *will* all win as all of their products looked like they'll sell like choc ices on the first sunny day of spring. Indeed some already are selling really well, so it was easy to explain that “nice try, but that’s essentially just a top of the range product that you’ve made even better and this is an *innovation* competition!”

There was a new air filter that lets you know when it needs changing, some excellent easily portable lattice flooring for fragile roofs, an easy slip on overshoe that helps minimise contamination from dirty floors, some hugely impressive looking plastic adjustable and self-fixing barriers, overalls with built in flashing lights, tailored insoles made of a new shock absorbent material to help with lower back pain and lightweight wraparound safety specs resistant to scratches, glare and heat. We had some fun with the presenters – “Those are just good quality ski goggles re-packaged!” – but we all snapped up the complimentary pair we were offered!

There really were “solutions” everywhere at the show – often to problems you didn’t even know you had. Naturally, most of the eight I saw came at a premium but none at a price that would put me off – in the absence of a more detailed investigation of graphs showing up-front investment quickly repaid ... they were only five minute pitches.

I couldn’t pick between them in terms of excellence but was able to cast a firm vote for a winner that highlighted an important issue for me. (I even talked around the rest of the panel with the following explanation). The product I picked is a lightweight and portable emergency hood. Expensive up front but with no maintenance costs as it’s vacuum sealed and good for 10 years. What I liked though was that it was about a third the weight of a standard rebreather kit. (The sales guy claimed a quarter but I’ve adjusted assuming that he hand-picked the competitor to compare with.) They mentioned Welsh Water as a client and since they’re a client of mine too (as well as being from the land of my fathers) I was able to imagine some workers I know wearing it.

Basically, if I had to work in a confined space lugging an item of kit that I had to have with me but would almost certainly never need to use – I would want a new product that weighs a fraction of the old one. That product would improve the work experience for me all day, every day.

The event was busy and successful but as ever the hall was mostly full of people in suits chatting and networking. At such events I always ask myself where all the workers are trying stuff on and trying stuff out with someone from accounts along to double check those fantastic rate-of-return figures. There are some of course – but I often think that five to 10 times as many would be about right.

***Challenge:*** Next time you book to attend an event like this don’t just suggest – insist – to the MD that you be allowed to take a car full of blue collar colleagues with you.

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