



**“W**illiam, something is wrong! There are three Air Force officers coming up the walk.”

“Don’t worry, Martha, I’m sure everything is OK.” (Knock at the door.)

“Mr. Jones?”

“Yes, I’m William Jones, and this is my wife, Martha. Come in. Is something wrong?”

“Mr. and Mrs. Jones, I am Lt Col John Kresek, this is Doctor Smith and Chaplain Sanders.”

Mrs. Jones’ voice trembling, cries out, “What is wrong with my baby? What’s happened with my Joey?”

“Can we all sit down please? I have some difficult news. On behalf of the Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force, I regret to inform you of the untimely death of your son, SSgt Joseph J. Jones. He died on August 22, 2003, near Nebraska City, Neb., as a result of injuries received in a motorcycle accident.”

“No it can’t be! Not my Joey!”

Although the names are fictional, this unfortunate script has regrettably been spoken 81 times this year by Air Force commanders to husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters of relatives who were killed in accidents; 28 times these members were Air Combat Command families, and closer to home, three families of Offutt personnel have struggled with these tragic words.

After only 2 weeks as the commander of the 55th Mission Support Squadron, I was reminded again how fragile life really is. Members of my staff assisted on the casualty notifications of two new A1C maintainers from Sheppard AFB, Texas, bound for their first duty station at Ellsworth AFB, S.D. Despite the outstanding efforts of law enforcement officials, emergency workers and the medical staff, both members died in a traffic accident before they arrived at their first duty station.

I was quite shaken by these events and pondered what I could do to help my folks prepare their own effective risk management program. I remembered the excellent safety briefing TSgt Darren Shorty, the Offutt Safety NCO, gave during my in-processing briefing on the concept of personal risk management. He had humorously covered the actions required to “ACT” correctly

and it stuck with me: Assess the situation, Consider the options, and Take the appropriate action. “It’s not rocket science,” Shorty reminded us, “But you do have to periodically run the checklist and make a conscious decision to do the right thing.”

Here are some timeless principles I use in my checklist and I hope you’ll use them too:

1. Wear your seat belt; it’s the single most effective thing you can do to live through an accident.

2. Never drink and drive, and when you see someone who is trying to — stop him or her. It’s better to jeopardize a friendship than lose a life. If you need a ride, call a friend. Call Airmen Against Drunk Driving, call a first shirt or a commander. Make a good decision while it’s not too late ... just don’t let anyone drive drunk. By the way, if they are real friends, they’ll thank you when they sober up.

3. If you drive a motorcycle, make sure you do it responsibly and know the rules. Be licensed, have appropriate insurance, wear the appropriate gear, and take the necessary safety training. Most importantly, drive defensively. Almost half of the safety-related deaths this summer involved young airmen with less than 6 months experience on motorcycles.

4. Pay attention to conditions: What is the speed limit? What are the road conditions? What are the weather conditions? How tired am I? Based on this, should I drive? ACT ... Assess, Consider, Take appropriate actions.

5. Check safety equipment/plans: fire alarms, evacuation plans, go over rally point procedures, replace flashlight batteries and know where fire extinguishers are placed. As the saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

6. Lastly, let’s all reaffirm our commitment to do the right thing. Have moral courage to correct unsafe acts you see. Practice good safety in the workplace and at home. The life you save could be your own.

We can all be very proud of the outstanding contributions we’ve made to the Global War on Terrorism. Each of us is an important cog in the ACC wheel of air power. The ACC commander has repeatedly said, “People are our most important priority.” We all have a responsibility to promote safety practices that protect our people. Every airman, NCO and officer must see himself or herself as a critical link in an effective safety chain. In closing, one last thought: Safety, like service before self, is a 24/7 operation. Safety now? You bet. It’s your job! Let’s spare your loved ones from that terrible knock on the door. ▶

# A Knock at the Door

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