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From Spielberg to SafeStart

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Larry Wilson would be the first to admit that his career path is far from typical – he might even call it downright extraordinary.

Wilson, vice-president of Belleville, Ont.-based safety training firm Electrolab Training Systems Limited, spends much of his time touring the world, espousing the virtues of simple concentration techniques to avoid injuries both at work and at home. But in the 1980s, the father of four was better known for gracing the covers of international magazines such as Gentleman's Quarterly, posing for Italian fashion designer Valentino and making the occasional appearance on daytime soap The Young And The Restless.

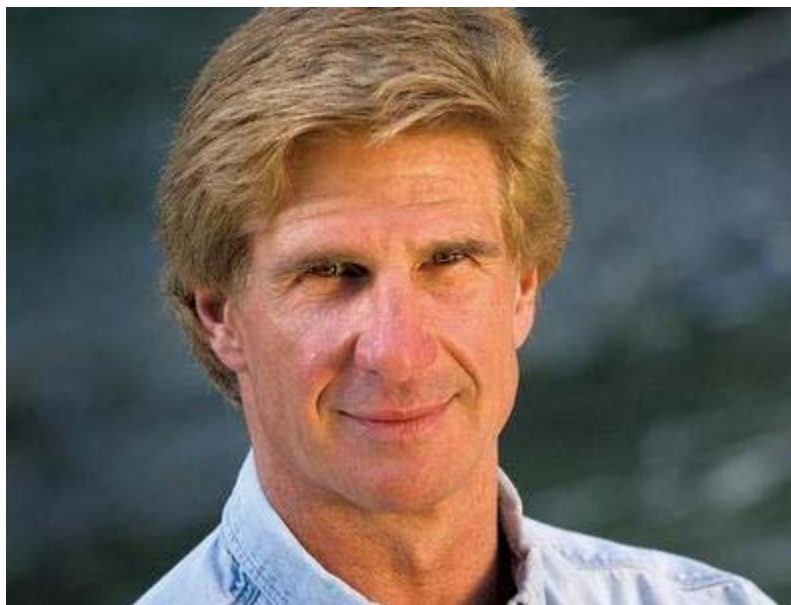


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Leaving a glamorous Hollywood career behind him, Larry Wilson decided to tackle workplace safety in his hometown of Belleville, Ont.

So, what would prompt a young man in his late-twenties, with matinée idol looks and a highly-successful career, to turn his buff back on quasi-celebrity status to become a safety guru?

"I still have long talks with myself about why we had to leave L.A.," Wilson deadpans from his part-time base in Whistler, B.C. "Was it really that bad? Just because it was shallow and vacuous?"

Indeed, Wilson lived the high life, hobnobbing with the likes of pop-art icon Andy Warhol, mingling with film and TV royalty, and earning upwards of \$1,000 per day for his acting and modelling efforts. The 52-year-old recalls his most memorable audition, with Jaws director Steven Spielberg.



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cool.”

By winning workers’ trust and sharing stories, he discovered how they were really injuring themselves on the job. It wasn’t that they were ignoring safety rules, but rather that the rules ignored basic human nature. Injuries, he observed, were caused by people who were rushing, frustrated, fatigued or complacent. Over the course of several years he drew on those experiences and designed a new system for injury prevention called SafeStart. The result?

According to Wilson, companies that employ the program reduce workplace injuries by an average of 60-90 per cent over two years.

Electrolab now boasts annual revenue of \$20 million – 70 per cent of which is derived from Safe Start seminars – and the program has been expanded to include a kids’ element to help tots avoid unnecessary accidents. The reason: Wilson found that workers weren’t so interested in their own safety – but keeping their kids safe was another matter. “I realized we could get at these adults who think they’re safe enough by talking about their kids, which is their weak spot,” Wilson explains.

That’s why Wilson has no regrets about leaving such a glamorous past behind. Preventing injuries, he’s found, is far more rewarding than posing for photo shoots.

“No one, no matter their attitude, is ever trying to get hurt and this is one area where I make a difference.”

“He flips me this hat,” Wilson remembers, “takes out a Nikon, puts me up against a wall and shoots a half a roll of film. The guy knew what he was doing.” The baby-faced actor had the good looks, but lacked the facial maturity Spielberg sought. Much to Wilson’s chagrin, the role of Indiana Jones went to Harrison Ford, instead.

It was around this time that he began to tire of L.A.’s decadent scene. Wilson continued modelling for a few years before returning to Belleville at age 29 to put his charismatic talents to work for his father’s firm, Electrolab, where he began teaching safety strategies to veteran factory workers. The reception wasn’t always enthusiastic. “The only reason I survived was that I could tell a story,” he recalls. “I didn’t look like I believed in it either, so the guys thought I was



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