

# How to Get the

**Shot**  
Revealing the Secrets  
Behind Unforgettable Photography

## Blog #117: Safety First



Have you ever been stopped in your tracks because of a photo presented itself so clearly and in such a compelling way in front of your eyes that you knew this is an image that would haunt you if you let it get away? That happened to me, and the result was ever better than I originally imagined.

In Florida, my condo is on the edge of a railroad track and as I walked by it, I was immediately taken by brilliant color combination that made my photographer's heart leap. The Department of Transportation worker was wearing official garb -- which consisted of a florescent orange shirt and florescent yellow pants with bring fluorescent orange stripes around gray stripes. I'm sure the required outfit is for safety concerns. After all, they are stationed along the railroad track doing repair, maintenance or other related safety tasks. When you're that close to a train moving at great speeds, it is in your best interest to let the conductor know -- vividly and from great distances -- that there is a man on the tracks.

The worker was seated in a director's chair-styled seat and when I asked to take a photo with my cell phone, he stood up to let me take a photo of the chair. I explained that it was he that I wanted to photograph and he was not at all interested. He didn't know who I was, and maybe he didn't want to be photographed sitting down on the job. Disappointed, I returned home, but when I remembered that there were two other workers on the other side of the street also in front of railroad signs, I grabbed my camera and headed back out.

I got a few photos of their outfits from the side, but when I approached them for a closer shot, they both said no, too. I even tried to sneak a shot capturing their fluorescent outfits with my telephoto lens knowing their faces would not be recognizable in the final photo, but it wasn't working. I decided to circle the block instead of walking directly past them again and at the next intersection, I couldn't believe my eyes.

Here, 50 feet up the same railroad track was another worker in the outfit I was seeking to capture, and this figure added a fashion twist of his own. He had on a green safety helmet and a bright blue shirt under the yellow safety jacket. And if everything couldn't possibly get any more photogenic, he held a black-and-white checkerboard umbrella over his head. I complimented him on the umbrella and asked if I could take a photo, and the happy "sure" he offered made my day.



Original



Color corrected and cropped

I moved in for the shot, bringing the green safety cone with red flag into frame, and positioned the camera so he was flanked by the railroad lights above and the railroad crossing sign in the distance behind his right shoulder. As I moved in, I noticed that the shadow of the umbrella made a great anchor below the photo, so I stepped back to take that in too. Some viewers ask how I pumped up the fluorescent colors, but in fact they were there in the original photo (see below). I just decreased the shadows and increased the exposure slightly. All the elements fell into place, and the resulting shot is one I won't forget.

## **TAKEAWAYS**

1. Trust your instincts. If you see a photo that resonates with your photo style and appreciation of form and color, go for it. Use the camera on your cell phone, or go and get your camera and return if possible.
2. Any photo that clearly has a recognizable person featured will need their approval to be included in your portfolio, but it's better to ask than to give up too soon. Someone who specifically declines to have their image captured has to be respected if your photo is capturing their likeness.
3. When you get a "no", look for other opportunities to complete your vision. Is there another subject nearly similar to your first choice? Is there something about the setting that can still be interesting without people present?
4. If you are able to take the photography you envision, take in the whole picture. Are there elements that can make the photo tell the story better? Is there an image in the background that add to your narrative? Is there a stop sign or a street sign that detracts from the image you want to capture?