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One Minute Poll: Reveals Widespread/Common Personnel Pitfalls by SBC Staff

Take Note: If personnel matters have you frustrated, you aren't alone.

Think yours is the only company facing the same grind of communication obstacles, rivalry between departments and "silo mentality"? It turns out you're not alone.

SBC staff asked component manufacturers to uncover their top personnel frustrations in a new ditty called our One Minute Poll (OMP). We asked "Is good communication in your operation difficult to establish?" Here is the feedback we received.

THE HUMAN FACTOR

John Piercefield of Piercefield Corporation spoke to the challenge of ensuring that accurate data is exchanged when human hands are involved in the manufacturing process: "Our greatest challenge in the communication arena is getting accurate data fed from production back to administration: data from the work order down— batches, trusses and pieces. Output from machines, such as saws, are not of the same format, even from the same manufacturer. Humans' data feedback is highly variable and inconsistent. Humans handling the data in production have less education; some do not communicate in English, and have their own spin on the data. By far, machine output is the more consistent of the two sources."

Carol Barineau of Wakulla Lumber and Trusses spoke of the struggle to increase efficiency: "Getting the shop department to implement new procedures to increase efficiency and effectiveness is our greatest challenge. Getting and keeping good laborers is a close second."

An anonymous respondent boiled the human factor down to ego: "The biggest challenge is handling the various egos."

Adequate communication between various departments, when combined with a lack of listening, puts another twist on the challenge of personnel communication. "Sometimes people communicate, but nobody is listening," remarked Casey Carey of Davidson Industries. "When this is the case, one may just quit communicating after a while. One solution we've found is putting the anti-communicators next to people who over-communicate and tend not to listen. In theory, each one will rub off on the other to make perfect communicators."

POINTING FINGERS

What about the constant challenge of managing the work flow from one department to the next? Duane Yurek of Littfin Truss raised the issue of finger-pointing between departments, resulting

in an interruption in the flow of work and ultimately decreasing productivity. "It is hard to keep everything flowing smoothly when each area thinks they can't do as good of a job as they want to do because the next department is causing them difficulty," he stated. "It may be that engineering is holding it too long waiting for information from the customer; therefore, production can't get it done by the promised date. Or the drivers hurry like the dickens to deliver when it's supposed to be there only to find out the basement hole is not dug yet. Or the saw department is behind the assembly department."

Frank Madden of Trussway, Inc. voiced his concern about adequate lead time: "Our biggest challenge is lead time to produce the products. Lack of it creates a rushed atmosphere and creates potential quality and safety issues. Working overtime creates fatigue, escalates labor costs and has the potential to create dangerous shortcuts by avoiding standard procedures."

TRAINING & MAINTAINING

Many noted that training and retaining staff tops the list of their biggest personnel nightmares. Fourteen percent of OMP respondents noted that between finding, training and keeping employees, they've got their hands full. "Our biggest challenge is training new employees in our process and methods," said Steve Johnson of Nelson Truss.

Harlee Thompson of Kenyon Noble Truss agreed: "Maintaining a trained and steady work force is a big issue for us."

INSPIRING TEAMWORK

Others cited teamwork, or lack thereof, as their greatest challenge when it comes to motivating personnel. A surprising 23 percent of OMP respondents voiced their struggle to foster an atmosphere that breeds positive attitudes and encourages teamwork. Elm Truss's Woody Miller shared, "Keeping an 'upbeat' atmosphere on a daily basis is one of our challenges."

"Our biggest challenge is getting everyone to work together for the betterment of the entire team," commented Barbara DeCoursey of John-Co Truss, Inc.

"We struggle with 'silo mentality,'" stated Joe DeMartino of Truss Tech, Inc. "Our technicians hardly know what the plant looks like! Other challenges are establishing a real team environment and creating a professional atmosphere. Getting the workforce to understand that data is not a 'weapon,' rather it is a tool to improve operations."

Encouraging employees to be increasingly aware that their actions have direct and serious implications on their co-workers and the team as a whole also seems to be a concern. Ken Bucek of Atlantic Truss noted his challenge in one specific area: "Getting employees to understand how safety procedures help them."

Olympic Building Components' Greg Goeks cited another: "One of our greatest challenges is getting the design department to understand their impact on production due to design and truss configuration choices."

"It is often difficult to get everyone to perform the little bit of extra follow-through it takes to make sure everything gets taken care of as it should," remarked WTCA President Kendall Hoyd of Idaho Truss.

Many others simply cited "cooperation and communication between departments" as their most prominent personnel issue. A whopping 40 percent of OMP respondents cited interdepartmental communication as their number one personnel challenge.

Rob Williams of BestBilt Systems was among that number as he reported "getting correct information from the salesman and builder to the design department" among his challenges.

Lewis Schelkopf of Midwest Truss shared his perspective on how to facilitate interdepartmental communication: "We are able to keep all communications channels open: we all take breaks together, have safety meetings together, and at least once monthly, the company buys lunch for all and a quick 'all cards on the table' meeting follows to let employees speak openly about any issues that concern them. To us, easy, free-flowing communication is the best way to keep all employees involved in all facets of the company. It may seem to a salesperson that a sawyer does not need to know what sales are potentially forthcoming, but any tidbit of info a sawyer can provide (i.e., cost savings on throughput) may help to land a job because the sales guy can trim his prices a little. The only way to get this kind of info flowing is for the two to feel comfortable talking about whatever their work may be."

One final perspective on the proverbial personnel challenge was best communicated by Casey Carey. "Communication takes an effort on all parties. It is not a one-sided issue," he said. "The environment has to breathe with communication and once someone stops communicating, suffocation begins. All relationships require communication of some sort, frontward and backward!"

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