

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE (FORMERLY WOODWORDS)

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President's Message



"Second Shift Woes" by Richard Brown

Several years ago, the truss plant I managed had more business than we could produce in a normal eight-hour day. The first step we took at that point was to increase the number of hours worked during the week from 40 to 45 (working eight hours a day and five hours on Saturday). This worked for a short period of time, but we quickly found out we needed to expand this to 55 hours a week (10 hours a day and five on Saturday.)

Just when we expanded to 55 hours per week we found we needed to expand our production time again. A light bulb went on and we started our second shift! Lo and behold, we had our answer! Or, so we thought.

We didn't have the workers for a second shift, so we set out to hire them, a task that we quickly accomplished. The problem then was that we needed someone to manage them. We were able to convince two of our most experienced truss assemblers to switch to our second shift. This worked out reasonably well, only to find out later that we had taken two valuable people away from a very efficient assembly crew and caused our "new" first shift to suffer a significant loss of productivity.

Our second shift began to produce trusses reasonably well. To get to this point, all we had done was hire a few workers and began to pull all of our less complicated jobs away from our more experienced day shift, so they could be shifted over to night shift production. This certainly helped our night shift, but it increased the burden for our day shift. It caused more work to be done by fewer people on the day shift, changed the roles of office personnel and managers during the day shift, and created less efficient production teams throughout the production process.

An additional factor we hadn't taken into account was that we didn't have truss design personnel working at night during our second shift. We came face-to-face with this problem during the second week we had two shifts. The problem was no one was available to produce and understand the cutting sheets needed for a particular truss. Given this, as you can guess, our production on that night was next to nothing. We needed to have someone at the plant, or on call to come in at a moment's notice to make sure that the design and cutting sheets were ready for the plant when it had a problem or needed to produce trusses that had a design issue to deal with. Our "on-call" solution didn't work as efficiently as we had hoped, but the process was the best we could do under the circumstances.

After undertaking this experiment of increasing production with a night shift for about six or seven weeks, and getting mixed production results, we learned that our "night managers" were sleeping on the job. Literally sleeping in the office while on the job. Needless to say, we couldn't have that! We terminated our managers, laid off our night shift and began a 50-53 hour workweek. We decided it was better to get by with good productivity from our complete day crew, rather than fight the continuing problems we were having with the night shift.

This was my first experience with trying to make a second production shift work. The lessons gleaned from that experience include:

- You need to have a full-time manager to run a second shift. This person must be a committed self-starter and have a vested interest in the success of the operation.
- You need the requisite number of assembly operators, saw people and lead personnel to effectively operate a second shift.
- You need to have truss designers working along side the second shift, or have a manager that can do the work that a truss designer would need to do during the shift work.

You can get by being short-handed at times, but in my opinion, you must have all of the above elements in place if you're going to successfully operate two or more shifts for the long term.

This year, our company has put in place most of these elements and has done a reasonably good job of gaining the required additional production we need to keep ahead of the demand for our trusses. We're constantly keeping our eyes open to ensure that we continue to stay abreast of any other ideas that will help our "night shift" be even more productive. At the same time, we're committed to not sacrificing our day shift to ensure night time success.

In this day of computer design programs, computer-aided saws, high-tech production tables and other technological advancements, you must have quality personnel on hand at all times, not just during one shift, in order to maintain productivity.

As you can see, this article deals with one aspect of truss plant personnel decision making. It happens to be one that I've been involved with and found to be more complex than I thought it would be. Other areas of concern include production incentives, hiring tests prior to employment, drug and alcohol screening, etc. I'm sure we all have "horror" stories to tell. This month's *WOODWORDS* tackles some of these issues with the goal to help YOU make good choices in personnel decisions.

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