Dealing with Difficult Behavior (Part II)

By Norb Slowikowski

Last month we talked about four of the eight basic types of difficult behavior a foreman might encounter when dealing with a general contractor’s superintendent. Here now are the remaining four behavior types and ways the foreman can deal with them.

What The Complainer might say: “I really don’t like how this is going at all. Will you look at this workmanship—it’s terrible. This schedule is getting out of hand, and this job will never get done on time. Do you really need this many guys out here at one time? They seem like they don’t care about this job. I’m very disappointed at how this is going.”


What the foreman should say: “You keep saying my crew doesn’t care about meeting your quality standards. I need you to be more specific and tell me what you see to be ongoing quality issues. If, in fact, you are right, rest assured it will never happen again. I’ll give you our two-week schedule that specifies exactly what we will be doing. I’d like to walk around with you while this is going on, and we’ll document any problems you see.”

What The Staller might say: “I can’t talk to you right now, I’m in the middle of something. These issues are going to have to wait. I’m not really in a decision-making frame of mind right now. I don’t know when I can talk about this—it will have to be later.”


What the foreman should say: “I’ve called you three times this week to get together so discuss your changing schedule, and you haven’t returned my calls. I can’t help you if you and I don’t get together to discuss the alternatives openly. I want to help you, but these ongoing delays are hurting both of us. Can we agree to meet every other Monday at 6:30 a.m. to review how we’re progressing on the job?”

What The Unresponsive might say: Absolutely nothing. There is no communication on any matter whatsoever.

What the foreman should do: Ask only open-ended questions. Use a friendly silent stare. Don’t fill in the silent space. Comment on what is happening. Set time limits. Consider “I don’t know” a non-response. Avoid a polite ending. Make next date, and follow through.

What the foreman should say: “What is the schedule for next month? I can’t support your objectives if I don’t know what they are. Can you meet with your people on next month’s schedule and get back to me by Friday at 8 a.m. so I have a clear understanding about where you want to be next month? Let me know where you want us to be, and I guarantee you we’ll get there.”

What The Super-Agreeable might say: “I always say, ‘Put off today what you can do tomorrow—or the next day.’ You guys are doing a great job—you don’t really need me poking around. Just all me when you’re done. Keep up the good work!”

What the foreman should do: Let him know his value. Don’t let him make unrealistic commitments. Listen to his humor. What does it really say?

What the foreman should say: “It’s great to work with someone who is always positive, but I know I’m not always right. I need to collaborate with you to make sure we’re making decisions that help both of us. I want to avoid problems that could occur if we don’t have a game plan that includes both of our ideas. Can we meet tomorrow at 7 a.m. to put a plan together?”

About the Author
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