The foreman is a key player in the construction process since he has to maximize productivity on the job site with his crew. If the foreman is going to be effective in increasing productivity, he must execute a set of skills to accomplish this objective. There are seven key management and leadership skills he has to master, and this article will deal with the first three.

**Be Productivity Driven.** A foreman has to understand the labor budget and either meet or beat that budget. Since 70 to 80 percent of the money on the job is in that budget, there is a lot of money to be made there.

A foreman needs to know his crew and set realistic goals for them. He needs to make sure his crew understands how much work they need to get done each day. He needs to say to his crew, “Here is how much drywall you have to hang today. Can you do it?” Some people think crews will resent that kind of direction, but I’ve found the opposite. People then feel like they are connected to something bigger than themselves, and that’s motivating.

The foreman is responsible for meeting the general contractor’s schedule, which is always very tight. I tell foremen: “If you are having trouble with the schedule, then call your project manager and superintendent. Work as a team. Don’t try to do everything by yourself.”

Another aspect of being productivity-driven is achieving quality results. The contractor wants the work done right the first time. I believe in “prevention and not inspection.” The foreman has to walk around. When he sees somebody doing something wrong, he has to intervene right away and make a correction. If you inspect it after it happens, and you have to do it over, that’s very costly.

**Be an Effective Planner.** A foreman needs to anticipate and forecast his needs at least a week in advance. Ask the general contractor, “This is what I’ll be doing next week. Are you okay with that?” Once the GC signs off on that schedule, make sure you get the proper tools, equipment, materials and manpower lined up. If you do it a week in advance, your warehouse or tool shop can get you the things you need. You also need to coordinate with the other trades. Planning is key.

**Get Organized.** Get the tools and materials on the job when you need them and where you want them located. Get them as close as possible to your working crew. When you order stuff from your shop, make sure they know where to deliver it on the job site.

Have a daily five-minute huddle with your crew to talk about what you have to get done today and to see if they see any obstacles to getting the job done. Ask them if they have any ideas as to how they could be more efficient or productive. Get your crew involved in this huddle every morning.

Make sure you document work that is not within the scope. If the GC wants to do extra work, say: “I’d be glad to do that, but I’ll need to get an extra work order for you to sign.” Then be very specific on the work order, including how long it’s going to take, what materials you need and your labor costs. If the GC doesn’t want to sign it, then tell him he needs to talk to your project manager. Tell him: “I’m told I can’t proceed without written authorization.”

Make sure you know how much authority you have on the job to make decisions. Everyone has boundaries. Find out where yours are. Go to your project manager and ask, “How much latitude do I have out here? How much money do you want me to spend on the job? How far do you want me to go if there is a problem with the superintendent?” I recommend that you call your project manager. Don’t be the bad guy. You have to live with that superintendent every day.

**About the Author**

Norb Slowikowski is president of Slowikowski & Associates, Inc., Darien, Ill. He is a professional trainer and a management consultant.