The Foreman’s Skills Set, Part II

By Norb Slowikowski

This is a continuation of the seven most important skills a foreman needs to have. What follows are skills four through seven.

**Be an Effective Leader.** A good foreman manages the job and leads the people. You don’t have to manage people because people will manage themselves if they are given the right conditions. I believe in the “lead goose” concept (like geese alternating flying in the front of the “V” formation). You want to develop “lead geese” in your organization, people who will step up and lead even when you are not there. Don’t be a “head buffalo” who calls all the shots and knows all the answers—a dictator.

To be a “lead goose,” you first have to let people own their jobs. You can do that by explaining what you expect of them. Next, give them everything they need to do their jobs. Last, give lots of positive feedback and no criticism. When people are in trouble, they need to be coached, not criticized.

Establish a climate for ownership. Involve your people. Do they have ideas to improve the project? Collaborate with people; don’t solve their problems. Be accessible and visible. Walk the job three to four times a day, asking how things are going. Make contact with the general contractor every day to see how you are doing.

Hold people accountable. If they aren’t going to do their jobs after you’ve worked with them and coached them, then let them know the consequences. Tell them if they continue in the negative path, they will probably lose their jobs.

**Be an Effective Communicator.** Make sure you are very clear and specific with what you expect. Have your crew repeat what you instructed them to do.

Listen. Don’t interrupt people when they talk. Listen to what they are telling you.

The key to communication is emotional control. Do not yell, scream or call names. When you are yelling or blaming, you aren’t listening, and when you cut off listening, communication stops.

Display integrity. Do what you say you are going to do.

**Maintain a Safe Work Environment.** Make sure you know what the safety rules are, and explain them to your people. Tell them that you will not compromise. Let them know that if they aren’t going to wear a hardhat, safety glasses and proper personal protection equipment, then they aren’t going to work here. Usually I find that the GC’s safety standards are lower than the sub’s, so the tendency is to relax the safety. Tell the GC you will not compromise safety. Make sure your crew knows to report any unsafe conditions to you. Include “tool box talk” in your morning huddle. Talk about safety and consider conducting a safety audit.

**Customer Relations.** There are two customers: internal and external. Your internal customers are your project manager, superintendent, crew and other trades on the job. Make sure you treat them with respect.

Be clear on what your external customers—the GC, the architect and the owner—want. If you can’t leave the job until the work is 100 percent complete, make sure you know exactly what that means.

Treat people right, build positive relationships and be solutions-oriented. If you see a problem, recommend ways to fix it. When you do that, you look like you want to be a part of it. A foreman needs a “whole job” focus. If you can help the GC look good, then help him. Establish win-win relationships by giving people what they want first before you ask for anything. You are there to impress the customer, not just satisfy him, so go the extra mile.

**About the Author**

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