The Seven Most Important Skills of an Effective Foreman (Part II)

By Norb Slowikowski

Last month we talked about how, in the past, the typical foreman came from the trades with no education on how to lead. Because each foreman must have the knowledge and skills necessary to be an effective team leader, we present this month the remaining four of the seven essential tools of an effective foreman.

**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 flying in the front of a “V” formation). You want to develop “lead geese” in your organization. These people will step up and lead even when you’re not there.

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 in order to do their job successfully. Lastly, give plenty of positive feedback and get rid of uninformed criticism.

Establish a climate of ownership within the company. Involve your people by soliciting ideas they may have for improving the project. Collaborate, but don’t solve all their problems. An accessible and visible foreman goes a long way in proving team involvement. Walk the job three to four times a day, asking how things are going. Then make contact with the general contractor every day to check on progress.

A top-notch foreman knows how to 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 what the consequences are. Tell them if they continue on a negative path, they will probably lose their job.

**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. Most importantly listen to what they are telling you. Without interruption, hear their ideas out.

The whole key to communication is emotional control. Do not yell, scream or call names. These negative tactics show that you are not listening, and when you cut off listening, communication stops.

The last step in effective communication is to display integrity. A top-notch foreman does this by doing what he says he is going to do. This creates trust.

**Maintain a Safe Work Environment.** You want your people going home the way they showed up in the morning. Make sure you know what the safety rules are and explain them to your people. Tell them that safety is an issue that you will not compromise. Let them know that if they aren’t going to wear a hard-hat, safety glasses and proper personal equipment, then they aren’t going to work. Usually, I find that the GC’s safety standards are lower than the sub’s, so tell the GC you will not compromise on safety. Also include “tool box talks” in your morning huddle. Talk about safety and conduct a weekly safety audit.

**Customer Relations.** There are two kinds of 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. External customers include the general contractor, architect and owner. Be clear on their needs as well.

Treat people right by building positive relationships and being solutions-oriented. If you see a problem, recommend ways to fix it. 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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