
People Plus Productivity Equals Profits

**In our labor intense industry,
nothing is more important than
effective “people management”**

by Norb Slowikowski



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During 1989 I've discussed the topic of "people management" with over 1,500 field supervisors representing a variety of sub-trades. I'd like to share with you some of their input about what they need to be more effective on-the-job, especially in the area of effective "people management." What the article describes are the various productivity "bottlenecks" with suggested solutions.

1. Long delays in transmitting information from the office to the job site.

Scheduling and conducting a *pre-job review* with foremen, superintendent, project manager/estimator and other key people will give all parties the information they need to perform their assigned role effectively.

2. Lack of coordination among the various trades on the job site.

Foremen need to be encouraged to carry-on a lot of *informal* communication between each other and what their needs are. This will help establish a cooperative relationship, rather than one of conflict.

3. The foreman doesn't understand the role of the project manager/estimator and vice versa. They don't understand each other's scope of work.

Each party needs to schedule *time* with each other in their respective environments. This will help them get a "feel" for the other person's primary responsibilities.

4. Broken tools and equipment are sent to the job site.

Foremen should be required to tag all defective tools and equipment specifying what's wrong with them. Someone in the office or warehouse should see to it that the items are repaired on a timely basis.

5. Poor placement of foreman on the job.

Most foremen are *technically* competent, but we tend to forget about his personality make-up. He will be dealing with the general superintendent of a general contractor. Have we identified the personality of that general superintendent and can our foreman deal effectively with him? What about his relationship with his crew? The project manager/estimator? His boss? These are the "people" aspects of the job.

Do we delegate *authority* with responsibility, or do we second guess the foreman's decision?—

6. The foreman lacks necessary information to be effective on-the-job.

Do you give the foreman the budget for the job-number of man-hours to complete the job or productivity measures?

Does he understand the scope of work?

What about such items as:

- the schedule (does he have *input* into the schedule?)

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Do we delegate authority with responsibility, or do we second guess the foreman's decision?

An effective foreman is . . . an effective communicator and a good listener . . . he encourages input from his crew.

- location and placement of materials
- work order procedures
- procedure for handling extras and changes
- material handling procedures
- unusual job site conditions

7. The foreman lacks an appropriate "skills-mix" to be an effective manager and leader.

In reviewing the skills of successful foremen, here's what we've discovered. An EFFECTIVE FOREMAN IS . . .

- an effective communicator and a good listener (encourages input from his crew)
- enthusiastic and has a high energy level (makes things happen rather than letting things happen).
- a delegator and a team player.
- an effective coordinator of manpower and coordinates activities with other trades.
- very organized and anticipates future needs.
- a developer of people.
- supportive of his people and emphasizes positives rather than negatives.

8. The foreman's effectiveness and productivity diminishes because of a deteriorating work climate that includes the following *demotivators*:

- Lack of sincere appreciation for a job well done.
- Unclear goals and expectations from upper management.
- Lack of incentives when excellent results and optimum profitability are achieved.
- Poor teamwork between field and office.
- Lack of pre- and post-job reviews.
- Ineffective job progress meetings (poorly run).
- Lack of scheduled visits to job site by upper management personnel.
- Job site disorganized and in disarray.
- Lack of understanding among foremen about another trade foreman's duties and responsibilities (this leads to job site conflicts).
- Lack of promotional opportunities from field to office (e.g. job foreman or superintendent to a project manager's job).

So basically what do we need to do to make the formula of PEOPLE & PRODUCTIVITY EQUALS PROFIT WORK. It can all be summed-up very simply: "Let your people on the job site know what the plan is . . . what you're trying to achieve and how . . . let them in on the know. Create the sense of "family" so everyone feels a part of the TEAM aiming for the same objective.

