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## ***Get close, part 2***

By Paperitalo Staff

Back in the 1 June 09 issue of Nip Impressions, I talked about moving people physically close to the operations of the pulp and paper mill. We'll take that a step further this week.

There are some people you can move close to the operations, but still never persuade them to leave their office. If this is the case, it is time to change the culture.

My stepson graced us with his presence the other evening (free meal). He and I got to talking about his summer job. He works at a prestigious golf course, a nationally branded collection with some high profile tournaments. The one here is not so high-flying, in fact it has lost its B-grade tournament. It is apparently losing money, bucketsful of it. My stepson, with two years of college and three summers schlepping bags and carts around this course, marvels at the dim-witted management decisions from on high. I asked him if he ever sees the managers making these decisions out on the course--out where he is. The answer, unsurprisingly, is "no."

Poorly run mills have the same culture. People come to work, go to their offices, shuffle papers, answer emails, yack on the phone and never, ever get close to the operations, even if they are right outside their door.

I worked in a mill one time where this culture was stunning. It was an old mill, had the traditional mahogany row for the bosses up front. There was one innocuous door that led from this mahogany row out into the mill (my office was on the mahogany row side). It was a time warp. Go through that door and you thought you had entered the vilest, most wretched ghetto in the world. One step from mahogany air conditioned pleasantness to Dante's inferno. A new senior executive showed up shortly after I did, and he owned a flashlight. And he used it regularly to go out, meet the people, look at their problems and solve them. In a few months, a sidekick of his showed up, one with the same philosophy. We redoubled our efforts to learn every inch of that facility. It paid off handsomely. The facility went on to make (sustainable!) record profits in a so-so corner of the business, with only modest capital expenditures.

Much later, over a decade later, the facility was sold to a new ownership that went back to the old way of doing things. It is now closed and abandoned. Yet, the markets are not so much different than they were back in the day of the record profits. I am not saying that knowing the details of the facility were everything, but they were a large part of the process (see also Nip Impressions from 4 May 09).

How can you tell if you are changing the culture? Look at what goes on in the morning meeting. Yes, a lot of data is covered, and cross departmentally, it is the first time some will hear about what is going on in other areas (but never within their own area of responsibility). The morning meeting should not, must not be a place of discovery--if it is your people are not doing their jobs. Rather, the morning meeting should be a place of solutions and plans. The people sitting around the production table should already know what is going on and should be there ready and willing to competently discuss the challenges of the day. If there is much surprise in the morning meeting, your culture needs fixing.

Managers on top of things today (people like Luis Henao, Ed Kersey and Mike Michaud, all at a location I can't disclose) are using their cell phone on the way to work (hands free, of course) to talk to management of the night shift so when they land on the site, they already have a status update of what has happened since they left. In the most modern mills, this data was on their blackberry or other device and they looked at it when they got out of bed, so they knew what they wanted to talk to the night shift about on the way in. In other words, a manager that is learning overnight conditions for the very first time when they hit the morning meeting at 09:00 is probably 3 to 4 hours behind. And this is on routine days--if something went bump in the night, they should have been alerted to that within just a few minutes.

We have spent a lot of time on this subject over the last couple of months, for it is most important. Your people assets are probably the least effectively deployed of all your assets. Use them to achieve great things.

Up close knowledge improves safety, too. Your people working in the mill everyday know what practices are unsafe, they may just be ignoring them. If you are out there every day you can see them and act on them.

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##

