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I thought this was elementary...

By Paperitalo Staff

Last week, I attended a local industry meeting in Destin, Florida. In recent times, when I show up at such a gathering, people often ask what I will take away and write about from the experience of mingling with the group. I play shy and coy and listen hard.

This was the take-away: many appear not to understand the importance of the morning meeting. And, from the conversations going on about me, I need to start with clarifying what a morning meeting is not.

The morning production meeting is not a place where you discuss the attributes of Viagra vs. Cialis (which if you do, may just end up in a sexual harassment lawsuit). It is not a place to tell your escapades of hunting, bar hopping, gardening, bird watching or whatever else you do on your time away from work. The morning meeting is not a preliminary try-out for American Idol. I could go on, but you get the idea.

If you have anything to do with scheduling, production, maintenance or input costs to manufacturing whatever it is you manufacture, the morning meeting is a very precious amount of time to determine and affect the fate of your efficiency and productivity. I did not say the morning meeting should routinely be unpleasant (although at times it may be) or sternly run, but it should be a time of precision and regularity. Everyone needs to show up on time with paper and a writing instrument, park their pagers, two-way radios, and cell phones at the door (the best mills have "cubbies" outside the door for these), and get down to business.

What is the business of the morning meeting? Sharing information that will allow you to safely make the best product in your grade made anywhere, with the highest efficiency and lowest input costs. This is the focus. To achieve this, I suggest you follow this order, regularly, every day:

1. Safety report
2. Production history, last 24 hours (quantity, quality, deviations from plan)

3. Scheduling issues
4. Short term operational issues
5. Long term maintenance review
6. Every managers' plan for the next 24 hours
7. Every managers' plan for the next 7 days

This should take no more than 1 hour if run with precision as a business-like endeavor.

Then a little hint: the best run mills have a second meeting, usually stand up, one-half hour before the end of the day shift, to discuss in detail any deviations from the plan of the day that will need to be addressed overnight. This includes assignment of managers who will either be on standby or on-site to handle the deviations.

Then there is the Friday afternoon meeting, which may last for an hour. This is a discussion of the topics above and the plans for the weekend. Beside the above topics, it will include a printed list of the responsible managers in each department for weekend duty, including how to reach them at all times.

The Saturday and Sunday morning meetings, besides having the 7 topics above, are a great time to talk about major housekeeping and demolition of obsolete assets. Why? Simply, everyone wants to conclude the meeting rapidly on these days and will promise the leader nearly anything to do so!

Now, does everyone understand the morning meeting? I don't want to have to repeat myself.

Is the above boring? Yes, it can be. However, good managers in any skill set that love production love the regularity of this activity. This is why your humble writer, a creative sort, once he reached his goal of mill manager at the tender age of 36, ran screaming from the building. The required regularity was not for me, but I did not realize it until I achieved it. But herein lays a clue: it just could be the disrupters in your morning meeting need to reassess their career goals. Perhaps something else would suit them better.

If you live in a mill with an out of control morning meeting (and you are not the manager in charge of the morning meeting), you might try printing out this column and clandestinely placing it at each place at the table (make sure you cut your name off the copy). Just maybe the wannabe comedians will get the hint and either shut up or move on (doubtful, but you can hope!).

You did notice I placed safety first on the agenda. Enough said.

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##