



onlyPulpandPaperJobs.com

Inefficiency with a twist

By Paperitalo Staff

Over the years, we have talked about this subject several times within several contexts. In these economically difficult times, inefficiency seems to be taking on a new twist.

First, my stand on inefficiency--I hate it. Inefficiency eventually ruins a business. To allow inefficiency to exist is about as immoral a business practice as I can think of next to outright stealing from your employer. Of course, inefficiency is a form of stealing, it is stealing with a bit of a nice patina. If inefficiency is a form of stealing and you know about it and let it stand, you are an accessory to a crime.

As we mark the third anniversary of the beginning of worldwide economic distress, inefficiency is taking on a new more insidious form. Traditionally, otherwise competent employees let inefficiency stand because they were lazy or thought it was not doing much harm. Such employees needed better monitoring or perhaps some education.

Today, I know of cases of inefficiency where the employees in other times may have done something about it, but now let it go for the inefficiency means they have something to do and can keep their jobs. They are embracing inefficiency for it means a paycheck in times of uncertain job opportunities.

Back in the 1960's, when England was suffering from an inefficient industrial base, there was a story told about how bad things had gotten there. Whether it was true or not is uncertain, but the story serves a purpose anyway. As it went, there was a gentleman who had a job in the executive office building of a large manufacturing company. He stood near a certain stairwell all day long--everyone knew him, spoke to him, ask him about his family, and so forth. He was a well-liked, jolly fellow. No one was quite certain who he reported to, or what he did, but they didn't worry about it, they knew he did not report to them. The company was going down the tubes in a big way. Finally, through the payroll records, a certain John Smith (I don't know his

real name) was found to be on the payroll. Human Resources had difficulty determining who he was or where he was. Well, it turns out he was the friendly gentlemen standing in the hallway, just around the corner from the Human Resource Director's office. They asked him what he did, who he reported to and how long he had been there, for everyone in the building always remembered him being there.

It was worse than they thought. As the gentlemen related the story, many years ago, when his father was a young man, his father had been asked to stand on that hallway corner while they were painting the walls and stairs. He was to tell the passersby to not touch the wet paint. After the paint dried, he was not reassigned. In fact, he made a career out of standing on that corner, and, as he approached retirement, he even arranged for his son, John Smith, to take over the post. John Smith was now 55 years old. For close to 70 years the company had paid an individual (first father, now son) to stand in the hallway beneath the noses of the company's executives! And they wondered why they were going out of business.

You laugh, but I can tell you, from being in mills every week, that modern mills are loaded with "John Smiths."

Today, mill managers and higher have more data than ever before. They think they are in control of their mills because they can nearly in real time see what is going on. For the very top executives in headquarters, this is probably a good thing. However, for a mill manager, it is a poor excuse for management and does not tell the real story.

The best mill managers I have ever seen reach out and touch their mill every day. They start with a walk through their mill at about 06:00. They stop in every department. Over time, they get to know every employee and what every employee does. You can do this in even the largest mill within 3 months. And when I say every employee, I mean every employee, from the guard shack up. Such mill managers may not turn on a computer or look at a spreadsheet until at least 10:00 (iPads are changing this, however, as we speak--many are now carrying around their data and are wirelessly connected to it all the time).

It boils down to this. If the day comes when a mill operates without people, then, perhaps it can be operated from an office. However, until then, and especially now, when employees are hiding inefficiency as never before, at least in my lifetime, you have to get out and touch and feel your mill. The data on the screens tells you less than half the story. You can plot all the graphs you want using the fanciest software in the world. Such data may tell you, in a very broad sense,

where a problem is. But you won't find it and solve it until you get out and touch it. Know your mill--there are inefficiencies out there that no amount of data will uncover or solve.

For safety this week, inefficiency, of course, leads to inefficient thinking all the time. That becomes laziness and we know laziness has no business where safety is concerned.

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##