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Invoice Printer Voyeurism

By Paperitalo Staff

Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt is credited with creating the modern internal corporate structure. His New York Central Railroad was the first company to widely employ people that did not directly have anything to do with the providing services or manufacturing goods. There were accountants, purchasing agents, and other such individuals and job positions that did not have to daily touch the services provided by the New York Central.

Today, corporations employ vast legions of people that never see the product being made or the service being provided. I think this is a very bad situation--one where a large number of employees do not know or have forgotten why everyone is at that corporation. This can foster a false sense of isolation and, in extreme cases, a very bad attitude of superiority among people that mainly sit in offices and manipulate forms and data.

No pulp and paper company can afford this attitude. Everyone should have to spend some time each year observing the invoice printer (in your mill, the invoice printer may be a pulp dryer, a paper machine, or perhaps a converting plant). No one is too good to avoid getting their hands dirty once in a while.

Were I the executive on site or the chief executive officer of the company, the following policy would be in force: taking vacation in any given year is preconditioned on spending one week in an operations role, no matter what your regular job may be. Yes, this means you will not be taking vacation the first week in January. Get over it.

A variant on this idea has been tried on some reality TV shows, where the CEO goes into an operation on a clandestine basis. In my world, there would be nothing clandestine about it. Everyone does their week.

What are the benefits to this idea? I don't know if I can list them all. First and foremost, of course, is those people who never see your invoice printer do so. In fact, they may like it so much they spend extra time taking a peep at it at times other than their mandatory week. They will have ideas about the operation that the regular operators have never, ever given a thought and some of those will be very, very good. Higher ups will hear unfiltered comments from operators, the value of which is absolutely immeasurable.

Should this work the other way? In other words should operators be required to spend a week at a desk job? Should the back tender be the receptionist for a week? I don't know, but I would sure think about trying it.

Removing people from their comfort zones and exposing them to other parts of the company will help the company become better at what it does. It will foster understanding between departments. It will improve the feeling of ownership and involvement. Factions and isolationism will be broken down. This always helps in every human endeavor. It will help your company, too.

Your EMTs, of course, as part of their training, should be exposed to the entire company. They have to be prepared to enter any space and understand the hazards there. Make sure they do.

Be safe, and we'll talk next week. ##