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Maestro's Morning Meeting

By Paperitalo Staff

Last week, we talked about how a mill manager should be a conductor, a maestro, and not a firefighter. This week, I want to talk about the Maestro's morning meeting.

While in concept good and necessary, many morning meetings I have attended are worthless and a waste of time. This is for two reasons: a lack of adequate preparation on a daily basis and a lack of an overall form and structure with objectives and expectations. Most of them remind me of a bunch of old guys sitting around an old-fashioned country store gossiping.

Let's start with daily preparation. Most participants in a morning meeting need to have at least two hours in the mill talking to people, looking at logs (electronic or paper) and just out looking at their area of responsibility before and if an effective morning meeting is to take place. In reality, they should arrive at the mill in time to talk to the night shift before they go home. If your morning meeting is at 9:00 this may mean they need to be in 3 to 4 hours before the meeting starts. Every day.

Participants in the morning meeting are giving testimony. And, like in a court room, testimony is not based on hearsay. Come with the facts, the facts you have personally checked out. There is no room for speculation. If nothing else, the morning meeting is a collection of the most expensive people in the mill. Their cumulative time should be respected and used economically.

Come with solutions, too. You may have a problem in your area and you may have two or three ways to fix it. Some may cost production, either in a slowing or stopping and some may just cost money. If possible, have very good information on the consequences of each path. If there is not time to do this ahead of the meeting, at least have an estimate on when you will have good information and call, at the morning meeting, another meeting to update appropriate people.

Be respectful of other people's time. Take your turn in turn and be succinct, to the point and informative. Be neither hostile or a comedian. Even tone, constructive comments. Jokesters and comedians should be replaced--it was a mistake they ever rose to the level to be invited to the morning meeting in the first place.

Quality control people have a propensity to take over the morning meeting and rant and rave about the latest quality problem from the field. First of all, make sure there is a problem--customers will sometime send you bad material in an attempt to negotiate a price decrease--but

you already knew this. Secondly, while quality is extremely important, the HR manager and possibly the maintenance manager do not need to take the time to hear the tactics of quality issues--their role in quality is strategic.

For goodness sake, bring paper and a writing instrument. Showing up without these items is a display of a complete lack of preparedness. And leave your cell phone behind or mute it--and never answer it in the room under any conditions.

I think if I were a mill manager again, I would tell my direct reports that 75 - 85% of my opinion forming for upcoming personnel reviews would be derived from what I see in the morning meeting. This is probably true anyway, but driving the point home may just help heighten interest in this most vital meeting of the day.

And, of course, you open the morning meeting with a safety report. Nothing else comes first.

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##