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No excuses

By Paperitalo Staff

Think back to when your current employer hired you. If it was any time in the last couple of decades, you no doubt went through a fairly thorough interview process. It probably involved interviews with several people. Likely, in one way or another, you did everything you could to convince these people that you were prepared, qualified and competent to do the job. “Throw it at me,” you likely said, either directly or implied.

Why, then, now, after some time on the job, do you have excuses when something is not going right, not up to high standards and so forth? Did they hire you to come up with creative excuses as to why things cannot be done? I don’t think so—you were hired to get things done.

I once worked for a boss that had a good saying. He said, “I work by the ‘2 can’t’ principle—if you can’t do it, you can’t stay.” A bit harsh, but it drives home the point.

What really amazes me is mill personnel that tolerate no excuses from their suppliers (a correct stance with which I agree) but who then turn around and give you a hundred reasons why they or those within their area of responsibility cannot do something. Don’t they see irony in this?

A friend of mine likes to use the phrase “hot breath of accountability.” It is appropriate. Unless you are in a highly charged political atmosphere, those willing to accept accountability are the ones which rise in the organization. Accountable, no excuse people are rare, and when management finds one, they hang on to them and give them more responsibility.

In another place I found myself, a new no-nonsense executive was brought on to the site. I had not been there but a few weeks myself, and the place was a disaster. Among other duties, I was in charge of maintenance. Later this executive said one of the things that impressed him was

that when I called him in the middle of the night, I was standing next to the disaster, not calling from my home. This is taking accountability for your area of responsibility.

Listen to yourself—are you making excuses all the time or are you stepping up and performing? If you are serious about reforming your own behavior, ask a couple of your colleagues to tell it to you straight—are you more prone to give excuses or get things done?

Last week I talked about personal defects and related some experiences I had when I was a teenager. Perhaps these helped me to build a sense of responsibility, a no-excuse accepted mentality. However I built it, I can tell you, despite failing at it once in a while, it has served me very well in my career. People who get things done are always employed, even in the job market we have seen in the past couple of years.

I think lunch time is a time when people train themselves to give excuses. They sit around and complain about lack of tools, stupid boss or any number of other gripes. It is infectious. People start trying to top one another. I was in a mill one time where the maintenance shops were impeccable and equipped with the latest tools and instruments. Still, the craftspersons griped about having nothing to work with—they were right: there was apparently absolutely nothing between their ears. I was thoroughly disgusted.

So do you have the guts to do an honest and thorough self-examination about your excuse litany?

For safety this week, of course there are no excuses. Yet, explanations for accidents are often nothing but cleverly disguised excuses. Make sure you are not a statistic in this game.

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##