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## ***Poor People Assessments***

By Paperitalo Staff

It seems a number of situations I have been exposed to lately reveal poor judgments when it comes to the people of our industry. I'll mention three this week--all of which have nothing in common other than human beings.

The first is an answer we often see when people take our "Do you have what it takes to be a mill manager?" survey. The question that amuses me is this one: "When I think of managing a union operation, I see this" and then there are three choices:

- 1 a chance to break the union
- 2 as something I have to deal with while keeping my eye on the goal
- 3 as embracing a partner with the same goals I have

No one has chosen answer number 1 (good) but the surprising result is that 63% have chosen answer #3. News flash, other than two (granted, important) objectives--(a) keeping the doors open and (b) operating safely and legally, management and unions do not have the same goals. Management desires to accomplish the greatest amount with the least amount of expense for employees while unions desire to employ the greatest number of people at the highest possible wage. There are not more divergent goals on the planet.

The second issue is excessive capital expenditures. While all mills need capital expenditures in order to stay competitive in an ever changing world, capital expenditures are often a mask for management problems. I don't think I have ever been in a mill that could not realize a 10% increase in production without a capital expenditure. The greatest example I have ever seen of doing more with less is the case of a mill a couple of decades which I knew very well. This mill achieved a 50% increase in production in less than two years with not only zero new capital but while taking out one of three paper machines on the site. This was as site where top management had been a revolving door for decades and which all higher management had pronounced as unmanageable.

The third case is one where it is cavalierly assumed people can easily change. This is the case currently being bandied about whereby it is suggested that graphics paper mills (newsprint especially) can easily convert to packaging grades (linerboard or medium). The people, all the people, in these mills will take far more training than anyone can possibly imagine to move from making, say, newsprint, to making linerboard. This is about as easy as converting a laminate countertop factory to making granite countertops. In both cases, you may use the final product as a surface for chopping up onions, but, boy, how you get that surface is very, very different.

At the outset, I said the only thing these three problems have in common is humans. That is not quite true, there is one other commonality. It is this: humans beings often fail to recognize what motivates and excites their fellow human being. They casually think others will do (or not do) something, when if they would just stop a minute and ponder how they would act if placed in the other person's position, they would quickly realize they are completely wrong. Putting yourself in the other person's shoes will help you see how things can be changed for the better.

For safety, keep in mind safety is all about human actions and reactions. I don't think I have ever seen an accident in our industry caused by the failure of an employer to supply the proper safety gear and training to do the job at hand.

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##