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Should everyone get out into the mill?

By Paperitalo Staff

The answer, when it comes to your employees, is a resounding, “Yes!”

Over the years, I have worked in and visited many mills where a certain element of the workforce never goes into the mill. This is a mistake.

That paper machine, that pulp dryer, that converting line is why your facility exists. All need to be engaged in its being. Admins, purchasing agents, everyone should, at least monthly, walk through one or two departments.

There are several reasons for this activity. First, it will help break down any class barriers you may have. Yes, you have class barriers—if some think they have no business or reason to visit the dirtier or noisier parts of your business, you have a problem. It may be a small problem, but nevertheless, it exists.

More importantly, however, people who do not visit an area daily, in any genre of life, can provide valuable insights. First, if their visits are on a longer cycle, they will notice things that change, good and bad. People who show up in a space every day do not see the evolutions and transformations because they see them happen a little bit at a time. Those visiting more sporadically see the changes.

Those unfamiliar with an area provide valuable insights. They will notice changes in safety conditions more quickly than the regulars because, again, they will be more obvious to them.

Additionally, they will be creative. Asking the question, “Why do you do _____ this way?” can provoke a creative progression of thought leading to a more efficient, higher quality way of doing things.

Formalize this process. Use a form, electronic or a piece of paper, which everyone has to fill out as a “trip report” for their visits outside their area. Log these in their personnel file. There should be twelve at the end of any twelve month period. They do not have to be spaced evenly, and probably should not be, but they need to be in every season of the year.

I’ll bet this is worth at least 0.5% of production and will improve your safety record. It will also create an appreciation for what your facility does amongst everyone who derives a living from

it. That is an incalculable benefit to each person and the company, for if they understand the big picture better, they may do a better job at their regular location.

For safety, you can easily see how fresh eyes give you a better perspective on safety issues. Take it a step further—invite a visitor to your area of responsibility to your next safety meeting to relate what they saw.

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##