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Where is the passion?

By Paperitalo Staff

I have to admit, I miss the good old days when people screamed, yelled, and threw things when activities or production were not proceeding according to plan.

The first thing you are probably thinking is “Wait a minute, Jim, just two weeks ago you were talking about workplace thugs.” You would be correct but for a fine line. Workplace thugs are trying to personally attack people. I am talking about the passion of a (good) coach, an eager fan and so forth to borrow from sports.

Today’s mill meetings are often so politically correct that they lack any sense of urgency to accomplish the tasks at hand. Further, they are often so dispassionate that the real root cause problems are not discovered. I have to say, I have attended meetings where I thought I was on a high school science fair project team. And the direction and urgency were nearly as aimless.

Passion is the fire that anneals the steel. It drives out the impurities. Passion can be awkward, clumsy and messy. That is why it is so effective—it challenges people to really get to the issues that are the stumbling blocks. Unfortunately, human resource departments, backed up by timid lawyers, have driven this effective tool out of management.

Yell at someone today and they run to HR claiming you are creating a hostile environment or picking on them. These are the same people who go to a sporting event and scream “Fire the coach!” at the slightest disappointment.

Yes, when I was a mill manager, my nickname was “Sledge” as in sledgehammer. That was over twenty-five years ago and I have mellowed a bit. I was probably over the top to some extent. However, there was never any doubt as to what I stood for, what I found important, how fast I wanted it corrected.

Without passion, emphasis on making today’s production goal has no more importance than requesting a burned out light bulb to be changed. Today’s workforce, raised in a coddled society, has no chance of developing a sense of urgency on their own. Everyone is a victim. No one is responsible.

I think, to some extent, there is an advantage to having an agrarian upbringing, where one had to deal with the vagaries of nature—rain when you didn’t want it, dry when you needed rain and

so forth. Towards that theory, I expect societies still moving from a large rural or agrarian population, that is third world countries, have a decided advantage in emerging industries over those well down the industrial revolution's path (United States, Europe, Japan, Australia and so forth). This just may be the competitive edge.

How do you feel about passion in the workplace?

For safety this week, of course, too much passion can lead to safety mishaps. It takes a skillful leader to keep all in balance.

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##