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## ***Don't forget the spouses***

By Paperitalo Staff

We recently produced a show over on Pulp & Paper Radio International called: "The New Consultant and their Spouse." It has been listened to many, many times. Doing this show, however, reminded me how important the spouse is to the overall actions and reactions of the employee.

This plays out on several levels. When I have had the opportunity to discuss the pulp and paper industry with young employees, and it makes no difference if they are hourly or salaried, I tell them that working in the pulp and paper industry is a lifestyle choice. An industry that operates on a continuous basis demands its employees be flexible with their personal scheduling, not the other way around. I further tell them that if they have a spouse that expects them to be home every weekend and never be called into work, find another place to work right now.

Most heed my advice, and the family comes to an understanding about the industry and its demands. I have seen a few not take my advice and try to live a bifurcated life. It is not long, however, until they either give up on the industry or give up on their home life. It takes a team at home and at work to work close to the production in our industry.

I had a friend who understood this better than anyone else I have met. He had a young, energetic and knowledgeable machine superintendent. When the machine was down, this person was in the machine sorting out problems, while the machine operator and the back tender stood in the aisle. That's not the way it is supposed to be. So his manager, my friend, told the young superintendent that he was to wear a white shirt to work every day or he would be fired. In three days, the superintendent was standing in the aisle and the people who should have been in the machine were. Why? The superintendent was caught between a boss that said you must wear a white shirt to work and a spouse who said if you bring home another ruined white shirt, you are in trouble. Great insight.

I have been careful to be neutral gender in my discussion here. Some of the worst problems I have seen, however, have involved a female employee with a male partner or husband. Men, alone at home in bed on third shift can conjure up all sorts of scenarios, real and imagined that might be going on in the mill. More than once, this has led to workplace violence, some based on facts, some based on fantasy, all disastrous.

Modern, wise mill managers will see these links and problems and address them head on. It is a special situation and takes extraordinary management skills, for one person is an employee subject to the policies and procedures of the employer while the other is an outsider, not subject to anything the mill may desire or do. Nevertheless, the situation crosses this gray barrier and may affect all involved.

What have you done about this challenge?

For safety, we know when people have problems at home they bring them to work in the form of distractions. We further know distractions lead to accidents. Perhaps a topic for your safety meeting this month?

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##