

Helping Our People to Trouble Shoot and Solve Their Own Problems

As managers, our key role is to empower our people to make more and more of their own decisions. This is one of the key factors to increasing productivity and effectiveness through out our company. To accomplish this we use every opportunity throughout the day and week to train this skill.

Thinking Three Steps Ahead

When our people are out in the field or on a factory floor, one of the key skills we need to emphasize is how to think three steps ahead. For example, when getting ready to start a job, what materials are needed? What tools? When doing a job, what are the next couple steps after the current step is completed? This can be trained by first telling the team member that you wish for him or her to learn a new skill – “how to think three steps ahead”. At the beginning of a job, stop the employee and say “Now, what materials will you need to complete this job?” The key skill your training here is the **stopping to think**, *which is not done naturally*. It is more natural to stop while a job is going on and travel back to the wherever materials are and get what you need, many times making three or four trips. Thus you make it into a game at first, quizzing the team member.

In the Drywall and Manufacturing industry, one of the key areas of importance is checking the quality of work. Part of thinking three steps ahead is that it is ok to step back and check the quality of your drywall job throughout the day. The same thing is true for manufacturing where it is important for a machine operator to check the quality of the first part being produced as well as a number of times throughout each hour of production. Here you teach the employee of the value of thinking three steps ahead in terms of checking the problem now so as not to continue the problem in the future.

Trouble Shooting

By turning trouble shooting more and more over to our people, we empower them to really take charge of their job. To do this we must first help our employee to define the problem they are having and then identify causes and solutions. For example, in the world of selling, it is important for a salesperson to be able to identify why they are having low sales. Trouble shooting in this area requires that you teach the employee the key factors that tend to cause low sales:

1. Not seeing enough prospects.
2. Not setting appointments on the phone or in person.
3. Not closing the sale or
4. Not having enough prospects. The task here is to have the associate independently identify the reason for low sales and then decide an action plan to increase their selling performance.

The same would be true for fixing a machine. What are the key reasons why this machine might be having a problem? This, at first, must be trained (in some cases on a machine by machine basis). As you do this, the employee will get a good basic education on machine repair. This is true also for looking at a problem you are having with the consistency of the mud used in drywall. The employee will need to be trained in what types of mud tend to work best – and what happens when the wrong mud mix is used. Train the employee to identify the possible causes and then define a solution based on the information they have or the adjustments they have made. It would be a good idea to put much of this process on paper since it can be systematically used again. This encourages the employee to become a specialist in the industry you are in. Teaching trouble shooting helps the employee to realize that they are much more in control of their environment than they realize.

On a smaller scale you can teach an employee trouble shooting by simply refusing to answer a majority of question and problems they bring you. Learn to ask: “What do you think we should do about that? “ or “What do you think the answer is?” This again allows the employee to learn to think and solve their problems. In the end, this can save you and the employee hours of time a day and week.

Helping Our People Learn from Mistakes

When a mistake occurs and managers solve the problem without turning the mistake into a learning opportunity, they ignore a giant training opportunity. The goal here is to not shame or blame the employee but work with the employee about what happened and what can be learned from it. Mistakes are really the main way we learn and grow anyways. Teach the employee to take the opportunity to learn from each error.

Helping Our People Set Goals and Inspect What They Expect

Have the employee set per job goals on what they wish to accomplish. On a machine, they might say “I wish to produce 300 parts in the next 4 hours.” In Drywall, they may say “I will get this room sanded and checked with a light by 3 p.m. this afternoon. In sales, the salesperson may set a goal to see 10 prospect today. Goal setting on a daily basis helps the employee to not only be self-motivated but to inspect whether they accomplished the goal and why or why not?

A good thing to do here is to ask the employee how their goals went for the day. If they reached their goal, ask, “What made that happen?” If they did not reach their goal, ask “What might you do differently next time to reach it?” The key here is to celebrate our victories and then learn from them as well as to make adjustments if we are not reaching the goals we wish to reach.

List out Three People and the Problems You wish for them to Solve or Trouble Shoot

1.

2.

3.

What are the Benefits to Doing This?

1.

2.

3.