

Time to Work Safe

By Carl Potter, CSP, CMC

The chief cause of failure and unhappiness is trading what we want most for what we want in the moment ~ Bertrand Russell



Tick, tock, tick, tock! The clock never seems to stop, and the tempo seems to increase with every passing moment. Everywhere I go in the country folks tell me the reason people get hurt is they are pushed to get a job done quickly – with no mention of safety. But is it the supervisor pushing for production or is it what employees think they hear?

I recall when I was leading a job and my boss asked me why it was taking so long. Before answering, I thought, “Is this a trick question?” My answer was, admittedly, a little lippy, “Well boss, it takes as long as it takes.” To this day I swear it seemed he was going to blow an artery! Further discussion behind closed doors ensued and I asked him if he really thought that we were taking too long. His response surprised me.

You see, he began to tell me that he was just asking because he needed to let others know when the equipment was going to be ready to go back into service. Other people needed the information for planning purposes and he was trying to understand why it was taking me longer than planned. Looking back, I understand what the real issue was.

At the time, I was a new foreman and trying to prove myself. It is my observation that those who really care about their craft want to do a good job and I was no different. My problem was that I heard his question as questioning my ability to do a job. Instead of just having a conversation with my boss, I put up a defensive shield in the form of a smart-aleck answer.

When a foreman or employee perceives that someone above them is pushing to get a job done mistakes begin to be made. Shortcuts to get the job done can lead to a job that is poorly done or someone getting hurt. For this reason I believe that everyone must work together to communicate that safety is never compromised to get a job done, and trust must be given by both parties in the conversation.

Trust is the cornerstone of good conversation. When a person is asking a question so that they can do their job better, the listener must respond in a respectful way to keep the conversation civil. When an honest answer is given the listener must respond to the person with a trusting attitude. This is not to say that everyone is going to play fair though. P.T. Barnum said, “There is a sucker born every minute” so it is important to confirm the sincerity of the answer.

In several article along the way I have discussed the need for honest communications. When we try to fool someone into thinking we are sincere trust is lost. It is vital that we not only communicate honestly in our words but also in our doing. If we give an answer to our boss it must be one that we would appreciate if we were in the their position. Anyone will agree that a group of people who are effective and efficient in getting work done trust each other. Many times I have been asked about someone, “Do you think they really can do...?” My answer would be, “If they said it, it must be true.” On the other hand there have been a few people that I responded with, “We will wait and see.”

To do a job safe we have to trust each other in our communications. If asked how long a job is going to take, it is tempting to add time for unplanned events. When communicating a time frame it is important to be honest. If completion time is critical both parties must be forthcoming about the time. For the person completing the job there is nothing more frustrating than a time table that was not true, or has been pushed up without thought about the time required to do it safe and with quality workmanship.

If there is time to do a job right, then there must be time to do it safe. Time is not something that can be manufactured and it is valuable. Respect each other’s time as you communicate about jobs that are being planned. During the process of completion make sure that your communication is framed with honesty and respect so that the result is a trusting work environment. In such an environment it is easier to create workplaces where it is difficult to get hurt.

**** Carl Potter has been presenting his virtual safety presentation **Keep Safety Simple** or **Who Is Responsible for Safety?** to help motivate and keep safety on the minds of employees. He is also available to deliver his **Hazard Recognition and Control Workshop** through *Microsoft Teams virtual platform*. Carl is interactive and keeps the presentation lively with stories and examples that keep even virtual audiences engaged. To learn how you can work with Carl to create a workplace where it is difficult to get hurt, email him at: carl@safetyinstitute.com