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## COMMON SENSE MAINTENANCE FRONT LINE SUPERVISOR DEVELOPMENT AND UTILIZATION – PART 2

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# COMMON SENSE MAINTENANCE FRONT LINE SUPERVISOR DEVELOPMENT AND UTILIZATION – PART 2

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## INTRODUCTION

In Part I of this two-part series, previously published in the January/February 2016 issue of *Inspectioneering Journal*, we discussed some of the challenges and solutions associated with promoting an hourly craftsman to a supervisory position. In Part II, we will examine what can occur during the course of a Front Line Supervisor's (FLS) day that may hinder the execution of their expected duties, and what can be put in place to overcome those obstacles.

It is widely agreed that an FLS's primary function is to supervise; to direct the craftsmen, clear barriers to their efficient execution of the work, and ensure the craftsmen are working at their greatest productivity. However, in some instances, the "lean" pendulum has swung too far and after reductions in personnel, duties have been reassigned to the FLS that preclude them from performing their primary function. The examples of improperly utilized resources highlighted in this article have been witnessed first-hand while conducting FLS day-in-the-life (DILO) studies at numerous facilities.

## THE IDEAL FLS

The ideal FLS strives to spend more time in the field than behind a desk. After the day's work has been assigned, they need to check on their crews before morning break to ensure work has begun as planned. Then they check in the field again between morning break and lunch, and again between lunch and afternoon break, and afternoon break and quitting time.

Their interaction with the crew(s) during these rounds should be geared towards ensuring the work has started as planned, permits are in-hand, and parts/materials are on-site. The FLS should clear barriers and obstacles, and ensure the crew is actually working as they should be. During these rounds, the FLS also needs to check to see if the work is progressing according to the expectations set by the FLS (e.g., a four hour job is not taking six or eight hours, the crew is not wasting time, etc.). If the crew is aware the FLS will be stopping at the job four or more times a day, they will tend to progress the job as planned, and contact the FLS immediately if they encounter any difficulties.

As noted previously, some FLSs have not been properly trained to fulfill the requirements of their position. As a result, they may not be making their expected "rounds" in the field. Many only interact with their crews during a morning meeting where the day's work is assigned, perhaps at lunch, and finally at the end of the day. They have no genuine perception of whether the work was accomplished or not, was executed at maximum efficiency, or of any impediments the crew encountered. These barriers could be

unprepared permits, missing or incorrect parts, or inefficiency on the part of the crew.

## POTENTIAL IMPACTS

So what are the activities and functions that may be keeping the FLS from performing as expected and being in the field? While an FLS does have certain responsibilities that require time at a desk, too much time performing mundane clerical tasks in the office is not their most important activity. The site requirement to perform certain duties has reduced some FLSs to the point where one supervisor described himself to me as "the highest paid clerk on site." Below are just a few examples of undesirable events and situations that have been observed being performed by an FLS.

- 1) Checking job plans/Planning work:** This is a circumstance that has actually been observed at several sites. The job plans are so substandard and unacceptable that the FLS must check them regularly and make corrections so the work can be executed. Or, in excessively poor situations, the FLS is forced to completely re-draft the work plans for their crew.

Planners should plan, and supervisors should supervise. If the FLS must check the validity and accuracy of each and every job plan, or plan the work themselves to warrant smooth execution, there is a far larger problem at the facility that needs to be corrected. If the job plans are unacceptable, they need to be returned to the appropriate planner for the necessary corrections, and the issue of deficient planning should be brought to the attention of the planning manager. Only in the most demanding circumstances (e.g., break-in work) should an FLS plan work for the crew(s).

- 2) Tracking/Obtaining material and equipment:** FLSs have been observed spending hours either on the phone or internet, tracking down parts required for work execution, which also ties into job planning noted above.

While there are some crisis situations where an FLS must step in to get material or equipment for their crew, this should not be the norm. Nor should they become a parts runner for their crew. The crew should draw the parts before they go to the job. If the parts are not contained in the job plan, refer to the notes above regarding planning. An FLS on the phone or internet looking up parts is not efficiently or effectively utilizing their time. Tracking or obtaining material is the function of either the planning or procurement group. If an FLS is responsible for tracking/obtaining material, they have lost significant productivity of their own job, and as a result, that of their crew(s).

**3) Too many/inefficient meetings:** While it is understood that meetings and the two-way exchange of information is a vital component of maintenance management, too many meetings, or meetings that are inefficient and accomplish little or nothing, can consume an inordinate amount of time. They take the FLS away from their primary function of being in the field managing their crew(s). In one refinery, we observed that two to three hours per day (for a 12 hour day) could be reinvested in the field by managing meetings more effectively.

Examine the frequency and timing of the meetings the FLS is responsible to attend. Determine if there are meetings for which an email or phone call from the FLS to the meeting chair providing the required information would suffice. Define what the meeting is to achieve, and if the FLS needs to be present at all. Examine if the meetings are held at a time when the FLS should be in the field, such as near the start/end of shift, or during the rounds as noted earlier. Ascertain if a daily meeting could be two or three times a week. Most importantly, decide if the meeting has any value or has merely become habit and can/should be discontinued.

**4) Completing the crew's paperwork:** there are certain functions for which the craftsmen, not the FLS, are responsible for. This would include completing the work orders or delay paperwork.

The crews should be documenting their delay time during the course of the shift. By conducting regular field rounds and communication with the crew, the FLS should already be familiar with the delays that occurred because he was informed and/or assisted in removing the obstacle to progression, and has no need to see the raw data forms.

The forms should be submitted to the maintenance clerk/admin who then enters this data into the system, not the FLS. The FLS should subsequently review the data in the tracking database and look for trends or indications of inefficiencies, and take steps or make recommendations to reduce or eliminate the delays. The FLS should not enter this data themselves. Doing so enables the crew to avoid their responsibilities in the equation, and adds another unnecessary layer to the FLS's workload.

The crew should also be finishing the work orders when the job is completed. This includes capturing man-hours, materials, etc. The FLS may have the accountability to enter confirmations into the CMMS, but the crews should be providing the information needed to complete this action by the FLS.

## CONCLUSION

As clearly noted throughout this and the previous article, an FLS should be in the field supervising their crew for at least 50% of their time, sometimes more depending on the industry, scenario and craft skill level. There will always be administrative tasks the FLS must undertake, but their principal thrust must be in the field

managing the craftsmen and their work.

The facility's organization chart and roles and responsibilities need to be examined to carefully determine what duties the FLS is currently performing that can and/or should be reassigned to the clerical staff. The salary for an FLS is substantially more than a clerk/admin and it makes financial sense for these ancillary tasks to be shifted to allow the FLS to fulfill their principal job function.

If a site could regain one hour per day per craftsman from proper field supervision, that is a worthwhile gain. A site with 100 workers would have an additional 100 hours per day to dedicate to work execution. This in turn can be directed at backlog, capital projects, improved reliability, and so forth. Proactive management applied by your field supervision can help you get there. ■

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