

From Trouble-maker to Trainer

Sometimes "problem" employees can be your biggest asset

I was doing a TPM workshop/training class with a large chemical plant in the East. The workshop was scheduled for four days. The first half of the day is spent in the classroom and the second half of the day on the shop floor implementing what we learned in the classroom. We were training a group of 5 cross-functional teams using 5 different pieces of equipment and I went to the plant early on Monday morning to get the classroom set-up and make sure that we had the necessary supplies.

When I arrived at the classroom, there was an older employee waiting in the classroom. I will call him Charlie. When I saw Charlie, I said to him, "You must be real excited about the training since you are here so early"

His reply to me was " NOPE!!," He backed up crossed his arms on his chest and said " I am here because I wanted to talk to you before the class gets started, My supervisor is the dumbest *#%#\$^* on the face of the earth. He sent me here to go to this class and waste my time. He thinks that I will learn something new that will help me do my job better. I want to tell you right now that I have been doing this job for 23 years and there is nobody that knows more about my machine and my job than I do. There is nothing that you can do to make me change the way I do what I do. I don't need this training and I don't want to be here. I am going to sit over there in the corner and mind my own business. I will leave you alone if you leave me alone!!!"

I immediately shook hands with Charlie and thanked him for telling me how he felt. I asked Charlie if he would mind at least sitting with one of the teams so he wouldn't stand out in the crowd. He agreed and sat at a table with one of the teams when the class got started.

During the first day, Charlie didn't have much to say, but he did not disturb any on the other participants. All during the day he listened and observed. He began to see things that made sense by the end of the first day. During the second day, he actually began to participate with the team he was sitting with. During the third day Charlie really got involved and started working with the team to implement some of the improvements he had heard during the week. By the end of the week Charlie was really getting into it.

He saw that by cleaning the equipment as a form of inspection, tagging and beginning to correct the problems, while brainstorming improvements-and creating standards for the equipment we would make the condition of the equipment much better and that he wouldn't have to struggle to keep the equipment operating. If he kept the process going it would definitely increase reliability and reduce the number of failures, which would make his job easier.

At the end of the week, I had all of the teams develop and make presentations to management-regarding their key learnings and outcomes for the week. The management was so pleased with the outcomes that they decided to train

every employee at the plant in the TPM process. I suggested that they allow me to train trainers for the plant and they could provide the workshop for all of the other employees. The plant manager asked me who I thought would make a good trainer for the site, and I suggested Charlie. The plant manager immediately went ballistic saying, "NOT CHARLIE, HE IS A TROUBLE MAKER! He has been a loud mouth and a trouble maker for years." I suggested that Charlie was really involved with the teams during the latter part of the week and that I felt he would be a good trainer. After a great deal of discussion the plant manager gave in and said "I guess if you think Charlie can do the job I will let him try."

To make a long story short, Charlie is now a Corporate trainer and travels all over the world providing training for the company. He is an excellent trainer and has become one of the corporations most prized employees.

The moral of the story is that many times the employees who are tagged as trouble makers are the employees that really care about the company. If they didn't care they would keep their mouths shut and not express their feelings. Once an employee like Charlie sees the benefit of a program like TPM they are very difficult to hold back. He became one of the strongest proponents of the whole process, and because he was an informal leader almost everyone would listen to what he had to say. He was very helpful in making TPM a success for the plant and the corporation.

The last time I saw Charlie, he was in an airport headed for Europe. He told me that he was happier than he had ever been in his life and that after nearly 30 years with the company, he finally felt that he was able to make a difference in the success of the company. He somewhat missed the production line, but was glad that he was able to help others like himself. He was now in a position where he could help others see how by using good common sense and applying simple techniques they all could make a difference. He also told me he was sorry he gave me such a hard time the first time we met.--

I have encountered several Charlies during the years that I have been doing TPM training. Almost without exception, once they are given a chance to get involved in improvements and someone listens to their ideas, they become much happier and will work much harder for the success of the company. It emphasizes to me to give the employees that run the equipment a chance to get involved in a hands-on process like TPM and they will make everyone's job easier. If they are known as a trouble maker, they may be one of your best employees hidden in the factory like diamonds in the rough.

by Michael F. Thomas- Manufacturing Solutions International
7704 Royal Harbour
Ooltewah, Tennessee
423-238-7601
Fax-423-238-7602
E-mail- mftthomas@worldnet.att.net