

THE TEAM MEETING

Confidential Instructions for the Team Leader

You are a member of a newly created work team in your factory. There are five members of the team, one of whom is absent today and one of whom is attending a two-day safety training session. As a result, there are three team members at today's team meeting -- the newly elected team leader (yourself), a high seniority manufacturing tech and a low seniority manufacturing tech. In addition, the meeting includes the supervisor, who is now referred to as the team advisor, and the union steward.

Recently, the team has been taking on more responsibility for daily decisions, such as job assignments, vacation scheduling, overtime balancing, and ordering supplies. There has been more teamwork lately, but there has also been more conflict as team members have begun to be more honest about what is bothering them.

The weekly team meetings are one hour long and you are twenty minutes into this meeting. You opened the meeting with a review of the agenda, followed by reports on safety, quality, schedule and cost performance. The team learned that safety and quality performance had been good, but that there were some problems with schedule. Apparently, your work area has been identified as a "bottleneck" in the production operation -- things get backed up at some of your machines, which means that other operations further down the line don't get all the parts they need. On cost, you have saved money by reducing scrap costs, but there is too much down-time due to unscheduled machine repairs.

There is just forty minutes left in the meeting. For each of the remaining agenda items (which are listed below) the time is listed, along with the name of the person who put the item on the agenda:

1. Running machines without safety guards (5-7 minutes -- Team Leader)
2. Skills progression/job rotation (5-7 minutes -- Low seniority Manufacturing Technician)
3. Preventative maintenance/work standards (10 minutes -- High seniority Manufacturing Technician)
4. Absenteeism issues (5-7 minutes -- Salaried Team Advisor)
5. Shift-to-shift competition (5-7 minutes -- Union Committee-Person)
6. Summary of decisions and assignments and next meeting agenda (5 minutes)

Each person will take the lead in presenting the item that they put on the agenda. You will help facilitate the meeting -- keeping track of time and moving from one agenda item to the next. The



low seniority manufacturing technician is the team recorder and you assume that this person will keep a good record of any decisions reached and any assignments undertaken. You have a few moments now to reflect on each of the agenda items in turn.

Running machines without safety guards. You have placed the safety issue on the agenda. You have watched some of the new, lower seniority employees run their machines without the safety guards or with "modified" guards. You know it is a way to save a half step, but you also know that the guards are there for a purpose. Learning after an accident is too late. Also, isn't this part of what a team is all about? Are you not all here to help one another? Your aim on this item is to do more than get a shaking of heads in agreement. You want some back-up plan that kicks in if the bad practices continue. Also, whatever the plan is, you want to be sure that is agreed to on a consensus basis. Some group brainstorming at a flip chart might be helpful here. You will look to the team's safety rep -- the high seniority manufacturing tech -- for support here. When you submitted the agenda item, you asked for 5-7 minutes. On reflection, you know the item might take longer.

Skills progression/job rotation. You are not sure what the story is here. You have been hearing from the leaders in other teams about higher seniority employees who are resisting job rotation. If there are dynamics like that in your team you are determined to avoid any quick stereotypes. You will want to find out why things are happening as they are -- what is the root cause of the problem, not just the symptoms. You will urge the team to focus on the problem -- an not to blame the people.

Preventative maintenance/work standards. This sounds like an important issue. You are not sure what the exact connection is between the two concepts, however. You know what preventative maintenance is -- regularly scheduled repairs and replacement of parts, combined with keeping machinery clean and in good condition. You also know what work standards are -- the standard time needed to produce a part under normal conditions (if there ever was such a thing). Some earlier informal conversations suggested that new preventative maintenance standards might lead to changes in work standards, but you are not sure about the scope and magnitude of the change. You expect to learn quite a bit about this when it comes up on the agenda.

Absenteeism issues. This is a complicated issue. You suspect that it is directed at Sam. While Sam does work hard when she is here, she has been absent four times in the past three months -- once for two days. Usually, there is little or no notice about her not coming in. This creates a real burden on you since you must provide relief until a replacement is found. Thus, you feel strongly on the issue. At the same time, you are uncomfortable singling out any member of the team. Thus, you hope that the whole issue can be dealt with in fairly general terms -- without specific pointing of fingers.

Shift-to-shift competition. The final item was added by the union committeeperson, who has never before put any items on your team's agenda. You are not sure what is meant by "shift-to-shift competition," but you suspect that the items is directed at you and the advisor for the team. Certainly both of you have been pushing for higher volumes. Concurrently, the other shift often leaves you with very little in-process inventory. Sometimes, you even do the same to them. It's not a healthy dynamic, but you aren't sure what should be done about it. You have talked to the team leader on the other shift, but with no noticeable effect.



Your team has had some training in communications and confrontation skills, as well as in effective meeting processes. You will do your best, as always, to use these skills during the meeting. Also, you will make sure that the resolution to any issue involves a clear plan -- with assignments specified, due dates set, and names noted. Also, you want to be sure that the team is clear in outlining what successful completion of the assignment would look like. Of course, all of this has to take place within the incredibly tight time constraints on your agenda. As you get ready to dive in on the last forty minutes of the meeting, use the little preparation time you have to address the following three questions:

- * When the team gets to your agenda item, how will you present it?
- * What do you need to do to be ready to address any of the other agenda items?
- * What would be acceptable or desirable outcomes on each of the agenda items -- from your perspective, from the perspective of the other team members, and from the perspectives of the company and the union?

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