

## THE TEAM MEETING

### Confidential Instructions for the Manufacturing Technician (high seniority)

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, a high seniority manufacturing tech (yourself) 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. PRIVATE

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. The team leader 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. 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.** As the team's safety rep, the safety issue is one that you are glad to see 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 it just causes you to shake your head in disbelief. You can still remember the fateful day ten years ago when your best friend lost a finger in a machine that he was running without the guard. Blood was everywhere. Your friend was lucky the damage wasn't worse. From that day forward you have been scrupulous about safety. You tried to warn the new kids, but they just don't listen. You hope that having the team leader talk about the issue as an agenda item will help.

**Skills progression/job rotation.** The skills progression/job rotation issue is a source of concern for you. You don't have any problem with the pay system -- where people are paid more if they learn how to do more jobs in the work area. You also see job rotation as good for ergonomic reasons -- you know that rotation helps to reduce the risk of injuring yourself through repetitive motions. In this case, however, you are very aware that you have been a barrier to the rotation. The other day, for example, you stated that, "It's fine for these young kids to move around, but I am happy to stay working at the job that I know how to do best." You said this in part because of your commitment to quality -- you believe quality is at risk with too much movement. The other reason for the statement is because of a bad back that you have been nursing for a number of years now. You don't often pull your back out, but when you do there is sharp pain for days or even weeks. You have never seen a doctor about this -- you really don't think there is much a doctor could do. As a result, you do not have a formal restriction from a doctor. You haven't said anything to anyone about this -- you didn't want it to keep you from being part of a team. Still, the truth is that you have been dragging your feet on the rotation since some of the jobs involve heavy lifting and twisting which could pull your back out again. You don't know what you are going to do when this comes up on the agenda, but you will have to be ready to say something.

**Preventative maintenance/work standards.** The preventative maintenance/work standards issues is yours. You once served as an alternate union steward, so you know something about the collective bargaining agreement. When it comes to work standards, you know that any change in any job element can lead to a change in the work standard. Under the new system, the team is supposed to be practicing preventative maintenance. This includes keeping machines clean, making regularly scheduled changes of cutting tools and lubricants, and working around a set schedule for larger maintenance tasks. Two weeks ago, a group of engineers came around to see how things were going and they handed out a new schedule for changing cutting tools and lubricants. You couldn't believe that this was just handed out without any attention to the "Managing the Change" process -- a process designed to ensure that people affected by change will be notified in advance. While this schedule may make sense and it may even help reduce the unscheduled down time, it also means that you can't produce as many pieces per hour. You have not been following the new schedule because you suspect that this is a work standards issue. Before implementing the schedule, you feel that the work standard should be adjusted to reflect the change in this job element. You asked for 10 minutes on the agenda because you know that this is a big issue. Unfortunately, Sam -- the team's Preventative Maintenance rep -- is absent today.



**Absenteeism issues.** It figures that the advisor would start riding people about attendance -- the next item on the agenda. You are also sure that this is directed at Sam, who is a hard working member of the team. She just happens to have missed a few days lately, but you have known her for years and you know that she is normally quite dependable. From private conversations you know that she is having a rough time dealing with all the complications of an aging parent who has cancer, but that is her private business. It doesn't help, of course, that she called in sick today -- but you are not going to let the advisor play one team member against another on an issue like attendance.

**Shift-to-shift competition.** The final item was added by the union steward, 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 it refers to the way that each shift is being pushed by its advisor to get high production volume. As a result, the other shift often leaves you with little in-process inventory. Sometimes you do the same to them. It's not right, but it's the way things have always been in the plant.

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?