

Employee Power



We've had about 7 inches of snow in Wisconsin this week ... big surprise.

Two short weeks ago I was jacketless, touching down in Orlando, Florida, to attend the Grainger Total MRO Solutions event for customers and media. To be honest, I think I would have attended a convention where we skinned live, rabid rats, were it held in sunny, 75 degree Florida in the middle of January. Fortunately, three days with Grainger and its customers was a much more satisfying way to spend the time.

The first morning, I had the privilege of sitting in on a networking event where manufacturers were able to engage in an open forum dialogue, voicing their fears, successes, and challenges over the past year, as well as what they were hoping to do in the upcoming years.

What I found most interesting about this forum was how basic some of the biggest challenges were, namely: labor issues relating to safety and company culture. Many of these folks were finding it difficult to implement organizational change and still get support and buy-in from their employees.

One question was striking. How do you as manufacturers attain “the company you *want to build*?” The group feedback in the forum leaned toward the idea of employee involvement—a bottom-up approach that puts some responsibility in the hands of each associate. Give them the power to shut down the line if there is a breach. Empower them to know what is safe and unsafe and give them a participatory role in the safety initiative... really, the difference between dispensing orders versus the actual involvement of your employees as stakeholders in this process.

As management, I think we become mesmerized with our own roles in these initiatives. We talk a lot about a “top down” approach, where management takes a

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spearhead role in new projects, methodologies or techniques, and the enthusiasm and support trickle down.

While this approach is great, maybe we don't put enough emphasis on truly saturating every arm of the company's personnel with pragmatic and actionable involvement. If we work from top down *and* bottom up, doesn't that mean we meet somewhere in the middle?

And if we can't meet in the middle, let's at least meet in Florida. It's really warm there right now.

How do you get safety buy-in from your employees or associates? Via a "top down" or "bottom up" approach? Let me know at anna.wells@advantagemedia.com [1].

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