

Avoiding 'That Guy' Status

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I recently had the opportunity to accompany a colleague on a business trip. I was prepared with the basics -- company information, the purpose of our trip, etc. -- but I was unsure of what I would actually see and think. Was the interview going to be the press released rehashed? Would the tour prove mundane? The trepidation was mounting.

Our destination was Houston, Texas for an interview and plant tour at [EagleBurgmann](#) [1]. Known as a manufacturer of mechanical seals, systems, packing and expansion joints, EagleBurgmann prides itself on making quality products for its consumers. But like every company, there's always room for improvement.

And really, that's why we went -- to discuss the company's improvement initiative. EagleBurgmann implemented a Manufacturing Artisan Program at its Houston location, where machinists identify non-conformances in manufactured parts before they reach inspection.

In order for machinists to earn and maintain their artisanship, they must keep a diligent eye on their product. Meaning, if three non-conformances are detected by anyone other than the machinist within a six-month period, they lose their artisan title and stamp.

Machinists can be recertified by reentering the program and repeating the entire certification process. A non-conformance detected by the machinist doesn't count against him because the worker is illustrating heightened responsibility and care for the products he is putting forth.

Of course, an incentive for such vigilance isn't bad, either. At the end of each six-month mark, any machinist who has maintained his artisan title and corresponding stamp receives a \$50 bonus. Hey, who couldn't use an extra \$50 these days?

During the official interview, hearing about the program from the top was

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interesting. You could tell that it really got management excited from the tone of their voices and the animation in their faces. Not only that, I became excited for them because you could tell that they genuinely believed in their program and how it has positively impacted their business on all levels.

That being said, what I found more intriguing was hearing about the program from those who actually participate. Getting out on the floor and talking one-on-one with the employees elicited genuine responses about the program and its impact.

The machinists admitted point blank that the bonus wasn't a fortune, but that wasn't necessarily the point. Participants laud the fact that employee input is not only valued, but encouraged, and the shift in responsibility has created a little friendly competition on the floor. No one wants to be "that guy" who doesn't have his artisan certification when everyone else does, so coworkers constantly push and encourage each other to achieve and maintain their title. Three cheers for friendly sparring to boost quality control!

Personally, I got the feeling that the program wasn't implemented purely for the sake of saving time and money. While it's never a bad thing, I perceived it was also created to heighten employees' sense of job satisfaction and to offer an opportunity for one to take ownership and pride in the product. Granting a part that "A-OK" status is literally putting your name on its quality, and no one wants their name on a failure.

In a world where the platitude "time is money" rules, it was uplifting to see a company invested in its employees as much as its profits.

Tell me about your positive work experiences either as an employee or an employer by e-mailing me at lauren.kiesow@advantagemedia.com [2].

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