

Adventures in Leanland

Lean people in lean businesses in a lean,
mean world

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6.3 Scenario 1: Walk a while in another man's shoes

Why a lack of engagement fails

Jed – shown as J below – is a Team Leader looking particularly perturbed. He tells the coach – shown as C below – that he cannot get Markus who works on the assembly line to follow the standardised work when he builds an assembly. The standardised work has recently been introduced for the first time. Jed has been trying to persuade him for weeks, but Markus is really digging his heels in. 'I'm going to have to give him a verbal warning,' says Jed.

C: Standing by the line talking to Jed: 'Why do you want to give him a verbal warning?'

J: 'Because he won't follow it.'

C: 'Won't follow what?'

J: 'The standardised work instruction. He's being really awkward. Could you have a word?'

C: 'No, it's your responsibility to resolve this one. I'll help though. Apart from this problem, is he a good operator?'

J: 'He's been a good operator 'til now. Turns up every day, gets back from breaks on time, makes few defects and makes his numbers.'

C: 'Blimey, and you want to give him a warning. Which stage [of the line] is he working on?'

J: 'Stage 6 again today, but he alternates between 4 and 6.'

C: 'Which one won't he follow: 4 or 6, or both?'

J: 'Not sure. I only know about 6. Does it matter? He just needs sorting out.'

C: 'Why am I interested in whether it's only 6 or includes others?'

A few mumbled half-hearted answers, before a hopeful:

J: 'To know if he's got a problem with just that one or standard work in general?'

The coach nods.

J: 'Hang on, I'll ask my setter when he was last on 4 and whether he had a problem then.'

C: 'Why not ask Markus? While you're at it, could you grab the standard work, please?'

Jed returns a few minutes later.

J: 'He says he's been fine without this bit of paper for three years so far and sees no need to change the way he does things now just because some office jockey comes and pins a bit of paper up by him.'

C: 'Who pinned it up?'

J: 'Me, but I briefed the team the morning that we put them out and I asked them to let me know what they thought.'

C: 'Was it printed in colour and laminated at that point?'

J: 'Yes.'

C: 'I'd be marked too. I'm guessing it was the first time he'd seen it.' A nod. 'A laminated, typed, colour document doesn't indicate that you were very serious about asking his opinion. We'll come back to that. Does he feel the same way about stages 4 and 6?'

J: 'He's only really moaning about 6, and before you interrupt, I asked him why and he says his way is better.'

C: 'OK. What are you going to do now?'

J: 'I've tried explaining to him before that the standardised work shows the best way, it guarantees safety, quality and cycle time. I even explained that it helps with training, covering absence and it means we can move people about on the line without jeopardising things... all the textbook answers.'

C: 'What did he say?'

J: 'He said his way his better.'

C: 'I'm with him so far. Nothing you've said to him sells the idea of standard work. The real question has to be: what's in it for him?'

J: 'I've just told you that.'

C: 'No you didn't. You told me what's in it for you and our company. What's in it for him?'

J: 'Surely I haven't got to explain everything to everyone. It used to be that people did what they were told. We pay his wages, so he should just do it.'

C: 'Ok. Go and stand in the car park for me will you?'

J: 'Why?'

C: 'Because I want you to.'

J: 'Look, I see what you're trying to say now, but...'

C: 'No buts. I agree that you don't have to explain everything, but Markus spends eight hours a day here doing a repetitious job several hundred times. You come along and tell him to do it differently without asking his opinion beforehand and then give him no good reason. I'd say he's got fair reason to be moaning. Put it a different way, do you think that it's worth talking to someone if you want to change the way they spend half of their waking life?'

Jed nods.

C: 'Any argument has a logical side and an emotional side. Markus needs a good reason to change the way he has spent the last three years. If you gave him a warning now, sure he'd follow the rule while you were looking, but as soon as you go he'd revert to his own method... and you'll get nothing out of him beyond the bare minimum. How many people work for you?'

J: 'Fifty.'

C: 'You can't watch one man out of fifty all day, can you? You want him to follow it irrespective of whether you are watching or not. It can't just be a rule. Voluntarily following the standardised work has to be something people understand the purpose of and can believe in, believe it's the right thing to do, have a reason to do it, some benefit for them. What's in it for him?'

J: 'OK, OK... job security, long term.'

C: 'True, but that's a limited sell. Most people don't think that long term or make the direct connection that their own job influences the company's future. So, once again: what's in it for him?'

J: Thinks, grimacing: 'What should I say to him?'

C: 'What do you think you should say to him?'

J: 'I don't know.'

C: 'Is his way better?'

J: Sheepishly: 'I don't know.'

C: 'So, try both ways and let's see. Before you try that, how will you know whether it's better or not?'

They have a discussion about safety being the primary concern, followed by quality and then cycle time and ease of build. Jed then trials both methods with Markus.

C: 'How did it go?'

J: 'Both ways are safe; no problem on quality and the cycle time is almost identical. To be fair, both ways work. He's got a couple of good knacks, but he loses a bit of time as well.'

C: 'So, here's the real question. If he can meet the standard time, safely and make good quality parts, does it matter if he does it a different way?'

J: 'Of course. If people have a different way, we'd need to set the area up differently depending on who is working at that time. We can't have two or three different versions of the standardised work for one job. It's hard enough to keep it up to date as things are.'

C: 'Good... and that's just the start. Let's focus on just one thing here. Let's say Markus's line has a bad day and the defect rate is high, including a new type of defect you haven't seen before. You try to solve it and narrow it down to one part of the line. Is your job easier or harder when proven standardised work is in place and being followed?'

J: 'Easier because I can rule out some things.'

C: 'Like what?'

J: 'The standardised work will show the best current way to assemble, so the defect is less likely to be caused by the way the product was built.'

C: 'Excellent. Problems on the factory floor generally come from five areas: materials – the parts he's assembling together are faulty; method – the standard work isn't

robust enough; machine – the machine or piece of equipment he's using isn't functioning as it should; man – your operator is creating the problem; or environment – something about the area is causing a problem, maybe ambient temperature or a draught or something else. If you've got strong, proven standardised work in place, which of those five can you rule out pretty quickly?

J: 'Man... and method, I guess.'

C: 'That's right. Your problem solving becomes easier. But what about Markus in this case?'

J: 'Ah, I see. If he follows the standardised work and a problem happens he's fireproof and won't get in trouble.'

C: 'Exactly. When you come marching down the line to investigate the defect, Markus won't have a worried mind because the standard work is like an insurance policy in his back pocket. Now he has a personal reason to follow it.'

J: 'OK, I'll go tell him that.'

C: 'Not yet. You said he had some good knacks. Here, take your pretty, laminated Standardised Work and a pen and ask Markus about those couple of knacks that would improve it. Let him see you update it as you talk, then run it past the Engineer and reissue it... then have the conversation.'