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Management Consultants to the Precast/Prestressed Industry

RESULTS IMPROVEMENT BULLETIN

PRECAST BUSINESS RESULTS IMPROVEMENT BULLETIN

Precast Business Results Improvement Bulletins are published by MJS Management Services. Additional bulletins that summarize current management challenges and solutions for the precast industry can be found at www.mjsmanagement.net.

MJS Management Services is a consulting firm that works exclusively with clients in the precast/prestressed industry to improve business performance and results. For assistance with this or other management challenges please call 206-388-5209 or contact us by email. Visit our web site for a full description of the services we provide.

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ACHIEVE PRODUCTIVITY GAINS FASTER – Tools to Build a High Performance Production Team

High Performance in Production – Results Faster

In our projects to assist precasters to improve productivity through lean manufacturing and other methods, we frequently find that organization weakness is a root cause for slow progress. Comprehensive change programs such as lean manufacturing place higher expectations on all levels of supervision. Shortcomings in leadership skills become much more evident in this environment. Management teams urgently want the results; lack of progress is not an option so solutions are needed to this challenge.

Common signs that organization weaknesses are holding back production improvements include:

- Slow progress during the implementation of productivity improvement initiatives such as lean manufacturing.
- Weak supervision skills - lack of leadership and direction, poor communication, inability to engage the team.



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- Overall slow pace of change, not open to change, actively resist change.
- Lack of innovation.
- Lack of urgency.
- Missing a "can do" attitude.
- Track record of missed schedules, excessive overtime.
- Poor quality or safety performance.
- High rates of employee turnover.

Tools are available to help diagnose organization shortcomings. Over the last few years we've worked with one of our associate firms, Concord Consulting, to assist our precast industry clients to build stronger teams. Concord provides technology to:

- Determine the profile of traits required to succeed in a specific job.
- Assess candidates against these traits to identify those with the closest fit.

This has allowed us to create a database of "high performance profiles" from entry level to senior positions. Candidates can be quickly compared to the database to identify those that fit the top performance profile.

This Results Improvement Bulletin discusses findings related to creating a strong production team.

Steps to strengthen the production team

Jim Collins, author of the influential book, "Good to Great", found that organizations identified as high performers had one common and foundational strategy: *"To be maniacal about getting the right people on the bus, getting the wrong people off the bus, and getting the right person in the right seat"*.

It all begins with who you let in the front door. In the precast/prestressed industry many of the people who walk through the door every day work in



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production. This is also the area with the highest turnover and perhaps greatest potential for improved productivity.

During assignments with various precast firms, we have identified a common problem that we believe is significantly contributing to mediocre first line supervision and labor turnover.

We utilized our traits profiling technology to measure the common characteristics of individuals who were deemed "high performers" in:

- Front line labor.
- First level supervision (Bed or area supervisor/foreman).

We found that a pattern surfaced repetitively.

The most successful front line laborers are very accommodating, cooperative, obedient, task focused, methodical, motivated by repetitive activities, and very dutiful in following instructions, specifications, procedures, and standards.

The most successful supervisors are assertive, somewhat ambitious, analytical, proactive, multi-tasking and very detail oriented.

This pattern repeated itself over different size firms with slightly different product mixes and manufacturing processes. As can be seen, the traits of a high performance supervisor are noticeably different from those of a high performance crew member.

The bottom-line is that individuals that align well with the laborer profile will struggle to be a high performing supervisor. However, often the high performance laborer is promoted to supervisor as a reward or based on the firm's desire to not lose them due to a lack of wage increase/career advancement opportunities.

Neither the employee nor their employer really benefit in this situation. A person with a laborer profile in a supervisor role needs more support, monitoring, guidance, and motivating – and the crew does not receive the



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leadership, pace setting, and problem solving needed to be highly productive. Improvement and change occurs slowly rather than urgently.

If these findings are evident in your business, then you have a strategic problem that will continue to replicate itself until you intervene and answer these two questions:

1. How do we begin to recruit "supervisor personalities" who will succeed at the laborers job but be promotable to supervisory roles?
2. How do we change our compensation and organization processes so we don't "cap" talented individuals who aren't ideal supervisors and managers (otherwise we'll be constantly recruiting & constantly training)?

Techniques are available, including the assessment tools described earlier, to assist management to identify individuals with "high performance" profiles during the hiring process and when evaluating employees for promotion opportunities. They help to "get the right person in the right seat". Organizations that achieve this proceed much more quickly with lean manufacturing implementation and other important improvement initiatives.

In future Bulletins, we'll comment on high performance characteristics for engineering, project management, field, sales, estimating and other functions.

For assistance with evaluating your organization and building organization strength please contact us at info@mjsmanagement.net or (206) 388-5209.

This Results Improvement Bulletin is provided in conjunction with Concord Consulting. MJS Management Services collaborates with specialists such as Concord to provide high quality and innovative solutions specifically tailored to the needs of our precast clients.