

The Plant Manager and the Yellow Line

Managing a huge plant requires attention to many things and most of them involve some level of detail. There are also usually a large number of employees. Daily, weekly, monthly goals must be met in addition to just keeping the place running smoothly with few to zero incidents.

I was engaged to provide coaching to a plant manager to help him with improving his leadership skills. In the course of our conversation about where he felt he needed most to improve the area of delegation popped up. Now, you would think running a plant would make you an expert at delegating! And, while this manager was fair at delegating he was also somewhat of a perfectionist.

Delegation requires a thinking process of going through what needs to be done, who is available to do it, who would benefit from the experience and how and when a task needs to be accomplished. Many tasks that managers take on themselves have not been subjected to the review process. It is often the case that the manager is holding on to tasks they are afraid will not get done to their expectations.

As we met and talked about this manager's "To Do" list we reviewed those things that were of lower level importance to the manager's role. I frequently give homework assignments to my coaching clients. This manager's first homework assignment was to go over his "To Do" list and assign out tasks that would provide the following: employee development, a new experience, clear away the manager's time to focus on more future and strategic things, getting a relatively low level task finished.

When we met next, the list had been pared down significantly and I was pleased. He told me it was a difficult thing for him to do however he found that his time was freed up for him to focus on some strategic initiatives. Some of the employees to whom he had delegated tasks were very pleased to have the responsibilities.

There was one thing on the list that he said he was unable to delegate, the painting of a yellow line on the plant floor. Most plants have these lines to indicate paths of travel for machines and employees. They are usually a safety requirement. He told me he had always been the one to paint the line when it needed repainting because the one time he delegated it he was not pleased with the outcome.

We talked about why that had happened. Not setting clear expectations and providing proper support are frequently the consequences of a poor outcome. I challenged him with delegating the task.

At our next meeting his report was that while he delegated the painting of the yellow line and it freed him up to work on other things, he was not pleased with the final product. Our conversation focused on the level of the task; did it accomplish the safety requirement, was it

done in a timely fashion, did it free time for him. The answer to all of these questions was “Yes”.

Most managers at some point in their careers suffer from poor delegation. This particular situation was very revealing for this manager to see how some tasks can be accomplished satisfactorily.



mypivotalpoint.com
robin@mypivotalpoint.com