

Doing The Responsible Thing

by Anna Wells, Editor, IMPO



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One of the things I don't think will ever go out of style is the general distaste most people have for frivolous lawsuits. Case in point, the world's disgust with the latest scenario to pepper CNN with the following headline: "Alumna Sues College because she hasn't Found a Job." I will pause to allow you to revisit your anger—something I do each time I read or think about this again.

For those of you who haven't read the article, it tells the story of a lawsuit filed by a recent graduate of New York's Monroe College. After a three month job hunt, Trina Thompson, 27, feels slighted by the mere two interviews she's been granted in her search, enough to sue the college for a full tuition refund and damage based on "stress" related to the job search. The full amount sought in the lawsuit is over \$70,000.

It seems the concept of personal responsibility has become skewed over time. What used to be a matter of pride—something one could accomplish based on his or her own volition—is now carrying a more negative connotation. Responsibility has become a matter of who is "at fault" for a certain situation, or how one's efforts can be excused by sharing the burden of accountability.

In order to take back a concept that's been hijacked by negativity, it's time plant managers create a responsible work environment that starts from the top: From a plant perspective, giving an employee specific responsibilities can be a great way to identify their strengths and further understand SOP. This also comes back to you in the sense that it's critical you really know your employees and the value they're bringing to your organization. Do you know how things get done, or just that they do? Are you aware of the preventive maintenance measures that prevent downtime, or just that the downtime doesn't occur?

This might mean a change in your presence on the floor: In this day and age, being scrutinized by management can be scary. Ultimately, employees should not feel as

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though they are assessed only for the purpose of determining whether or not they are expendable. Make it a daily or weekly occurrence, and more importantly, make it known that employee evaluation is based on a metric for acknowledgement and rewards for employees who take their responsibilities seriously. There are lots of incentives to provide employees that don't require a lot of cash flow; think plant floor signage, good parking spots, or a Friday afternoon off.

I've been to lots of plants where the management's presence is just business as usual—a typical occurrence where company leaders mingle amongst their operations and maintenance personnel. Sometimes, however, there is a visible disconnect between those in the office and those on the floor. If your absence means you fail to identify the people and actions behind your successful initiatives, you might see less and less success as a result.

In the end, if personal responsibility from your employees is something you value, you can bet it will be something they value as well. It's daily lessons like these that become so ingrained in us that we don't even think about our roles within our companies—we simply assume them. Instead of employees that fear responsibility like this young college graduate who is reticent to be accountable for her job situation, you might find they go out looking for it.

Think responsibility has gone out the window in favor of blame? Do we need more positive enforcement? Or are employees rewarded enough as it is? Comments are welcome at anna.wells@advantagemedia.com [1].

Comments:

Meg

You asked, per your latest column, for suggestions on how employees can contribute to their companies while still staying healthy.

In a nutshell, everyone should remember that their boss is their customer. The boss hires each employee for specific job duties and expects them to get done, done correctly, and on time. Any additional contributions are solely complimentary services. Anyone who does not satisfy their job duties will not be merited, no matter how many times they take out the trash.

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