When Quiet Times Happen

Sometimes slowdown periods are planned: for example, throughout Europe, the month of August is recognized as a time for vacation.

In other circumstances, slowdown is not anticipated: in 2009, for instance, several automotive manufacturers imposed shorter working weeks or reduced production targets in an effort to safeguard the future of the company and its workers.

While planned slowdowns may be easier to deal with and manage, all companies should have a plan in place to cope with quiet periods effectively – whether they are planned or not – and protect the interests of the business and its workers.

Explore lean opportunities

During quiet times, there may not be much opportunity to invest in research and development. This is exactly the time when you need to be looking at ways to move the business forward using creative and lean ideas. When you are busy working all day, there’s no time to take a step back and evaluate the efficiency of the work process flow and identify any potential process improvement opportunities.

The definition of insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

While an unplanned quiet period may not be attributable to any specific cause, it does represent an opportunity to review, revitalize and streamline the core processes.

Build relationships with key customers

Developing a positive working relationship with your customer base – whatever industry they are in – will help you “gain and retain” work to proactively avoid unanticipated slowdown periods. It may also give you insight into the workings of other companies, which can support ongoing, and new, customer relationship development.

Conversely, if your company is planning a slowdown, while planned slowdowns may be easier to deal with and manage, all companies should have a plan in place to cope with quiet periods effectively.

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having an established relationship with your customers will ensure their understanding and support.

Become an expert

If you are approaching a planned quiet period, consider using the time to investigate ways to position your company – and you personally – as an industry expert. Gaining Nadcap accreditation, or working towards Nadcap merit status, for example, are key demonstrable attributes that show your company is a leader in quality and superior product manufacturing. Even if you find yourself experiencing an unplanned quiet period, take advantage of the time that provides to develop your proficiencies personally and professionally. A skilled worker and a company with a strong reputation will always be in demand.

Postpone new ventures

Depending on the circumstances, quiet periods may not be the right time to invest in new activities such as new plants, new equipment, new hires etc, even if you had planned to do so. Be honest with yourself about the nature of the slowdown and the likely impact on the business before expending resource on new undertakings.

Communicate with staff and suppliers

One of the most important things to do before, during and after a quiet period is to communicate openly with your staff. Unexpected slowdowns can make workers feel insecure and uncertain about the future. This can make the situation worse because morale suffers and productivity falls while employees speculate on the future of the company. While it is vital to go out and find new business, the staff should be kept as informed as possible. The same applies to your suppliers: open communication is key to maintaining a good relationship, even during quiet times, so that you are prepared for when the work is more demanding.

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