

**In our efforts to open the lines of communication company-wide and to break down the walls between production and front office departments, we are considering creating a monthly or quarterly advisory meeting consisting of a representative from each department. We would have guidelines and an agenda so that the any other employees could bring their comments or questions to those on the committee to initiate discussion. Is anyone else doing something like this and what could you share with us or another method of opening communication?**

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Ours is an active process. Topics that have been discussed this year include monthly Group Online Education (safety and 2015 mission), Cross-Function Groups and their purpose and expectations. Next month we will discuss communication and technology. We have been doing this for three years. It works great and the folks have great input!

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Sounds like a great idea. I'd love to hear more about it. You can never communicate too much.

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We actually started an "Activity Team" that has an employee from every department so that their departments can bring any input to the team via its representative. They now officially have a voice. We have found this a very useful since we get input that that is outside of activities.

Through the team we also identified employee morale and how to address it. Employee involvement that incorporated a newsletter in which the same team member brings information, questions, challenges from their department. We have implemented other company functions as a result. (Chili cook-off, company picnic, theme holiday events) I am pleased with the overall communication this has created and the noted improvement in overall employee morale.

One final comment, the timing always seems to have worked out so that we capitalize on big productive months or where we needed a shot in the arm. Making more of a an impromptu event, rather than a fixed date on the calendar seems to especially make the employees appreciate it rather than expect it event.

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We hold meetings every Tues. & Thurs., which involve an individual from each department within our company. This has really worked well for us in opening communications within the company.

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One place I worked, the president held a quarterly meeting with a cross section of employees from different departments to discuss different topics. There was an agenda and the meetings helped everyone feel more involved in the success of the company and gave them the opportunity to share concerns. This organization was 350-400 people.

I personally would not want to create a formal "Committee" to do what I think managers/leaders should be doing every day. If the lines of communication are really open, information should flow back and forth and through all segments of the organization

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We have three standing Employee Committees –

1. MORALE meets monthly and its sole purpose is to maintain the familial feel of the company planning Packer/Brewer parties, Heart Walk participation, Benefits for Employees in distress, Can Goods Drive, etc. The Committee is financially independent raising its funds in various ways. They also conduct various employee surveys to remove the disconnection mentioned.
2. HEALTH INSURANCE meets semi-annually to discuss market trends and Insurance offers prior to their release. Although they have no voting rights, their recommendations and “on the floor” explanations to employees cannot be undervalued.
3. SAFETY meets monthly with two outside consultants who provide “best practice” advise to all members, conduct safety surveys, posts safety results, and engages with employees on a positive note. They have full authority to take corrective action steps when called for, but their primary mission is to listen, react, and solve safety issues so we can continue to run “lean and mean.”

We also have a monthly newsletter as well featuring safety issues, marketing issues, births, birthdays, anniversaries, etc. handled by internal marketing personnel to keep people in the loop.

In addition we have paid quarterly meetings with all employees who desire to attend presented by our President and CFO to present current financial information, business trends, new equipment, and new business opportunities. All of Senior Managers meet weekly as part of the company's Steering Committee to refute or explain potential morale issues presented to them and to nib them in the bud.

Managers/Supervisors have bi annual meetings to discuss/compare notes with their peers on issues of significance as well.

There is an old story from Motorola – When the Japanese bought them the defect rate was 110 out of 100 made. So the new owners went to Management and they said “the production people only care about their paycheck.” They then went to the shop floor and they said “the people in the office only care about units produced and they don't listen to us.” One went on to say, “I've asked them to build me this jig to lower the defect rate for the last ten years and all they say is it won't work.” The new Japanese owners agreed to produce the jig and within a year the defect rate fell to 2 out of 100.

Did the Jog work? No, but the owners knew that if they LISTENED to the employee the employee would go out of his way to prove the old management wrong! The moral of the story is that the most valuable asset that any organization has is its employees – what can you possibly lose by listening more and talking less!

My response to opening up a line of communication? ASK YOUR EMPLOYEES!

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We have a monthly meeting that we call the “1st Thursday meeting”. We have it in our production breakroom. Most times we have food (morning snack, afternoon snack, or lunch).

Our owner speaks and gives the employees an update on anything that is going on that they need to be aware of. We also recognize any quality catches made by the employees (they get a quality t-shirt too). If they have something to discuss, then our quality manager, our production manager, customer service, or accounting/HR (me) also speak. Then the owner asks the employees if they have any questions or comments. He states that this is their time to bring anything to the discussion. Sometimes there are a lot of questions from the production staff and sometimes there are none. This seems to work for us. We have about 40 employees total. We do a meeting for the 1st shift and then again for the 2nd shift.

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First off it is my opinion that the tone of any organization starts at the top – if the top leadership is not on board with any approach, the approach does not have a chance of succeeding. Having said that, here is what we do:

1. The front office is actually part of the management of the production facility. In our case this is the Controller – he helps manage this area through a Production Supervisor, Production Coordinator, and two Production Group Leaders. We felt this was a good way to keep the two areas connected – literally.
2. We have regular meetings to discuss what went right, what went wrong and how we can improve
3. Foster an atmosphere of transparency – too often the Front Office does not get involved except for reviewing the numbers and then makes assumptions and/or jumps to conclusions. It takes the whole company to achieve excellence and communication comes from the top to start this culture.
4. The Front Office should be a part of these regular meetings to help break down these walls. Most of the time the walls are part of miscommunication and misunderstanding from both sides. Each needs to get to know each other and appreciate the challenges of each area in order to start this process.
5. Constantly ask each other what can we do to better our relationship – challenge each other to come up with ways to stay connected and focused on the overall goals.
6. Develop the overall goals together and communicate them to the whole company so everyone is pulling in the same direction.

As you can see, this is dear to my heart. It is people that make a great company and we need to spend time on these relationships and respect each other along the way.

Hope this helps.