

How effective safety leadership helps reduce waste from a Lean Production perspective

Emotional waste is a real thing. Workers who have to deal with this type of waste on a daily basis are likely not achieving their potential and therefore are less productive. Effective frontline leadership can help to reduce emotional waste.

One definition of Lean Production is the practice of identifying and removing waste or non-value added steps from a system or process.¹ Once waste is removed, or at least minimized, what remains are only those steps needed to achieve the desired outcome.² According to the Lean Construction Institute (LCI), project-related waste including wasted time, wasted movement, and wasted human potential, can be greatly reduced and project scheduling greatly improved by implementing the principles of lean design and construction.³

Eight types of waste have been identified and organized into the following categories: **D**efects, **O**verproduction, **W**aiting, **N**ot utilizing talent, **T**ransportation, **I**nventory excess, **M**ovement, and **E**xcess processing, forming the acronym **DOWNTIME**.⁴ The focus of this brief article is on the category **N**ot utilizing talent which results from crew members not having the opportunity to reach their full potential for carrying out their work, including creating a safe jobsite. We propose that **N**ot utilizing talent can negatively affect project outcomes as well as be detrimental to crew member health and safety.

Not using talent reflects a lack of respect for crew members' capacity to contribute ideas that could lead to improvements in work and safety-related procedures to better protect workers. In this situation, management plans, organizes, and controls the work while the employees are expected to just follow orders and execute what management planned.

The problem with this approach is that the crew members are likely the ones most capable of identifying problems and developing needed solutions. Thus, not utilizing or underutilizing their knowledge and skills affects not just job-related waste but also employee well-being in the form of emotional waste. In their 2014 book, *SCRUM: The Art of Doing Twice the Work in Half the Time*, Jeff and J.J. Sutherland, state:

*"While there are many tangible and measurable forms of waste that can be addressed in a company (on the jobsite), one of the hardest to measure and get rid of is the emotional kind"*⁵

Emotional waste contributes to stress and detracts from engagement and job satisfaction. This in turn can lead to crew members having less desire and enthusiasm to work to their potential resulting in lower productivity, quality, and safety.

So who is in the best position to address the “N” waste and reduce the potential for crew member emotional waste? The answer is the foremen or other frontline leaders such as superintendents who are on the jobsite working directly with the workers to help ensure the work gets done and done safely. The fact is though that many are promoted to these positions without the skills they need to effectively lead their crew, respect them for the skills and knowledge they have, and give them opportunities to participate in continuous improvement.

Fortunately there is a 2.5 hour training program called the Foundations for Safety Leadership (FSL) that teaches these frontline leaders five critical safety leadership skills they can practice on a daily basis to help minimize and even rid their jobsites of the potential for crew member emotional waste. Here are the five **LEADER** skills and the type of emotional waste workers may experience when leaders don’t use them:

Skill	Practice	Emotional waste if not practiced
Lead by Example	‘Walk the talk’ Make safety a core value and make sure everyone owns safety.	Uncertainty due to being told what to do and how to act, but watching others, particularly their leaders, not following the rules.
Engage and Empower Team Members	Encourage and empower crew members to identify, report, and remove hazards - and to come up with solutions.	Frustration at not being asked for ideas on how to do task even though they may know a safer and more efficient way to do it.
Actively Listen and Practice 3-way Communication	Listen to hear and understand what crew members are telling you and make sure they understand what is being said or asked.	Annoyance at not being listened to when raising an issue and Anxiety due to not understanding the desired outcome of the request being made.
DEvelop Team Members by Teaching, Coaching, & Feedback	Act as a teacher and coach and provide constructive feedback using the FIST principle: Facts, Impact, Solutions, and Timely.	Apprehension and <i>fear</i> of being ignored or ridiculed when they ask for more direction on how to complete a task.
Recognize Team Members for a Job Well Done	This can be done in private or in public if the employee is comfortable with it.	Resentment from never being recognized for going above and beyond what’s expected.

Front line leaders and others in management positions can limit and even eliminate emotional waste if they have the courage to learn and practice the five leadership skills taught in the Foundations for Safety Leadership. All FSL training materials can be downloaded for free by clicking on this link: <https://www.cpwr.com/foundations-safety-leadership-fsl>

References

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