

# SuperVision

## The Seven Most Important Skills of an Effective Foreman; Part I

By Norb Slowikowski

The latest trend is to push more responsibility to the job site level. Schedules are tight, so decision-making is done right on site as issues arise. Companies are also running much leaner operations, so the biggest challenge to being profitable is in building an effective team. In the past, the typical foreman came from the trades with no education on how to lead. Each foreman must have the knowledge and skills necessary to be an effective team leader. In essence, the first three of seven essential tools of an effective foreman are as follows:

**Be Productivity Driven.** A foreman has to understand the labor budget and either meet or beat that budget. Since 70 to 80 percent of the money on the job is in that budget, there is a lot of money to be made there.

A foreman needs to know his crew and set realistic goals for them. He needs to make sure his crew understands how much work needs to get done each day. The foreman has to say to his crew, "Here is how much drywall you have to hang today, Can you do it?" Some people think crews will resent that kind of direction, but I've found the opposite. People feel like they are connected to something bigger than themselves, and that's motivating.

The foreman is responsible for meeting the general contractor's schedule, which is always very tight. I tell foreman: "If you are having trouble with the schedule, then call your project manager and superintendent. Work as a team. Don't try to do everything by yourself?"

Another aspect of being productivity driven is achieving quality results. The contractor wants the work done right the first time. I believe in "prevention, not inspection. "The foreman has to walk around. When he sees somebody doing something wrong, he has to intervene right away and make corrections. If you inspect it after it happens and you have to do it over, that's very costly.

**Be an Effective Planner.** A foreman needs to anticipate his

needs at least one week in advance. Ask the GC: "This is what I'll be doing next week; are you OK with that?" Once the GC signs off on that schedule, make sure you get the proper tools, equipment, materials and manpower lined up. If you do it one week in advance, you can get you the things you need. You also need to coordinate with the other trades. Planning is key.

**Get Organized.** Get the tools and materials on the job when you need them and to the place you want them located. It is best to arrange them as close as possible to your working crew. When you order materials from your shop, make sure they know where to deliver it on the job site.

Have a daily five-minute huddle with your crew to talk about what you have to get done for the day, and see if they notice any obstacles to getting the job done. Ask them if they have any ideas as to how they could be more efficient or productive. Get your crew involved in this huddle every morning. Make sure you document work that is not within the scope. If the GC wants you to do extra work, say, "I'd be glad to do that, but I have an extra work order for you to sign off on." Then be very specific on the work order, including how long it's going to take, what materials you need and your labor costs. If the GC doesn't want to sign it, then tell him he needs to talk to your project manager. Tell him you can't proceed without written authorization.

Make sure you know how much authority you have on the job to make decisions. Everyone has boundaries. Find out where yours are. Ask your project manager: "How much latitude do I have out here? How much money do you want me to spend? How far do you want me to go if there is a problem with the superintendent?" Call your project manager. Don't be the bad guy You have to live with that superintendent every day. 📌

### About the Author

Norb Slowikowski is president of Slowikowski & Associates, Inc., Darien, Ill.