

Staff Duties questionnaire

By Joel Levitt

You've got a pretty good staff. You figure that the difficulty that you are having is always going to be part of managing a group of human beings. But still and all there is something nagging at you.

Did you ever feel that the staff of the fleet was working at cross purposes to your goals? Does it seem that right when you need the people they are working on some project or report for another group? Finally is getting them behind a new initiative like herding cats?



Frequently a major invisible issue among the staff people of Maintenance Departments is the difference between what the staff person thinks that their job is and what the Manager thinks. This is called dissonance. Dissonance has several meanings, all related to conflict or incongruity. In this case it is the conflict between what the manager thinks and what the staff person thinks.

Symptoms of this situation are staff people working at cross purposes to your goals, staff people spending large amounts of time working on areas that you don't think are important, and complaints that you don't understand the "problems" of their position.

This assignment is recommended where some amount of trust is already in existence. There are certainly situations that you may prefer not to use this type of exercise, or may prefer to wait until the timing is better. The assignment is very valuable if you are willing to look at the results with an open attitude. The exercise can be done in writing, verbally, or have an outside party conduct the interviews. **It should not be tied in any way to salary or performance reviews (and that should be made clear).**

We sometimes call this a job dissonance exercise. (Adjust the language and format of the questions to reflect your style and environment)

Assignment:

Explain to each staff person that we are conducting a study of the Maintenance department. This assignment is given at a launch meeting where the project is physically started. People should take the list back for a week or two to add things that they forgot.

What you tell the people: List all your activities. After you create the list please describe each activity in enough detail that an outsider could understand what you are talking about and include: In a typical week what % of your time is spent doing what activity, what are your most important activities, what activities do you like best, what activities

do you like least. Add any comments about your job that you think could help this study.
Important: Please add any activities that happen annually or quarterly.

At the same time the Maintenance Manager writes about the duties of the above staff person. He or she will define the duties of the above position. How much time should be spent on each activity? What is the most important activity, what is the 'mission' of the position? If you have a formal job description for the job, include it as a third opinion.

How to use the results:

The areas of difference of opinion are the areas to look at. This is where an open mind is essential for success. It is frequently the case that the person doing the task has a much better idea about what is important to the smooth running of the department than does the manager. Of course the reverse could be true too, there could be some old procedures and processes that should be put to bed!

Is the staff person right in their view, is there something you can learn. Did the job develop over time so that much of the effort no longer supports your current needs? Can you define the job using the input from the staff person to better serve your departments needs?

When the review is complete you have an excellent start on or revision to the job description. More importantly you have an opportunity to intervene into the business system that produces the useful output (in our case maintenance services) and streamline it.

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