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# An Analysis Of The Foreman's Job

## A Study of the Foreman's Functions Helps Him Understand His Role As Member of Management

RAY R. FALLER

Much thought and effort have been devoted to evaluating the position of the first-line foreman in the industrial organization structure. He is the lowest member of management, and yet the one who usually has the closest contact with non-supervisory employees. In many instances he is acclaimed a member of management but is treated like an illegitimate member of the corporate family. In more enlightened companies he is truly regarded as a member of management and is accorded some of the courtesies and privileges associated with that section of the industrial hierarchy. Regardless of the extent to which he is recognized and rewarded, his job is important and essential to efficient production and harmonious employee relations. Therefore the foreman deserves the attention, research, and experimentation showered upon his position.

In the training efforts we have made with our own first-line foremen in the last ten years, we have studied those aspects of his job associated with human relations, organization, delegating, planning, directing, budgeting, and record keeping plus an exceedingly large number of other chores that fall to his lot. A mere listing of the many and diverse activities that are supposed to be discharged efficiently by the foreman is enough to make a sane individual seek other employment. Yet to his everlasting credit the average foreman meets these myriad tasks and requirements daily with a fortitude that is truly astonishing.

### **Foreman's Tasks Compiled**

Over the years as our experience in this phase of training became greater we

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evolved an approach to foreman training that may be of interest to the *Journal* reader. In our first discussions with experienced foremen we asked them to list the tasks that they performed on a recurring, periodic, or occasional basis. With some 15 men in the group it was not difficult to get a list that is impressive; the first included 130 duties. It is true that many of the tasks or functions expressed by the men were duplicates or were similar in scope, but even when these were eliminated the list was still sizable. Some of the listed tasks were performed with great regularity whereas others only occasionally. For example, planning was practiced continually whereas disciplining was practiced only occasionally as required. A typical list of foreman duties in abbreviated form is shown in TABLE I.

The next thought that came to us in the evolution of our training was to

group these diverse tasks into certain categories. We selected three groupings which seemed to encompass the major work functions of our foremen. We classified the tasks into those that pertained to operations, administration, and personnel. The items appearing in TABLE I are shown under these headings in TABLE II. There may be other general categories that will appeal more to the reader. We offer no brief for the ones we selected other than that they served our purpose.

### **Tasks Grouped Functionally**

With these classified tasks as our starting point we began to analyze them individually to make certain that the foremen learned more about their applications to the job. We had the advantage of several interpretations of each task as reflected by the individual ex-

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TABLE I  
RANDOM LISTING OF FOREMEN'S DUTIES  
(as given by the foremen)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Boss the job                         | 16. Demand quality   |
| 2. Get the work out                     | 17. Train new and old workers                                    |
| 3. Keep costs down                      | 18. Handle all employee relations                                |
| 4. Enforce safety                       | 19. Supervise his people   |
| 5. Use time and tools carefully         | 20. Give advice when asked                                       |
| 6. Assign workers to jobs               | 21. Be consulted on dismissals, hires, promotions, and transfers |
| 7. Know the union contract              | 22. Keep equipment in good shape                                 |
| 8. Keep within budget                   | 23. If necessary, discipline workers                             |
| 9. Plan each job                        | 24. Know company background                                      |
| 10. Housekeeping                        | 25. Keep up morale of group                                      |
| 11. Be familiar with local rules        | 26. Know company's competitive position                          |
| 12. Improve processing of products      | 27. Understand benefit plans                                     |
| 13. Keep records up to date             | 28. Inspect work   |
| 14. Deal with the union representatives | 29. Practice self-development                                    |
| 15. Eliminate waste                     |  |
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TABLE II  
CLASSIFICATION OF FOREMEN'S DUTIES

*Operations*

1. Supervise his group
2. Examine and improve procedure
3. Maintain production and quality
4. Maintain equipment
5. Prevent waste
6. Insure safety

*Administration*

1. Plan the work
2. Assign the work
3. Budget time, tools, and money
4. Keep adequate records
5. Maintain housekeeping

*Personnel*

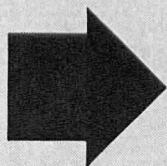
1. Handle employee relations
2. Train workers
3. Counsel workers
4. Discipline workers (as required)
5. Recommend hires, transfers, promotions, and dismissals
6. Maintain employee morale
7. Know company history, organization, and policies
8. Know local regulations
9. Handle union relations and understand the contract
10. Know company benefit plans
11. Know company's place in industry
12. Maintain good community relations
13. Practice self-development

periences of the men. Through adequate discussion and examples of application we were able to share the other

fellow's views. As we proceeded we gradually veered away from the specifics of the listings into the general categories

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of operational tasks, administration functions, and personnel relations at the shop level.

By this means we got away from the long listings of what a foreman is supposed to do. We have come to the conclusion that in learning a new job or in informing himself on an old job, the person should not be immediately confronted with a list of duties of such a size as to spell discouragement. The categorical or functional approach seems better fitted for training because it concentrates on general functions rather than on specific duties. Through this approach the new or the experienced foreman gets a better working concept of what his job really is. The tasks themselves are performed as required on a daily or periodic basis with little thought as to how many there are in total.

This would seem to be universally true for any job. Does a concert pianist think of the number of notes he is going to play? He thinks in terms of the complete selection. Does the orator think of the number of words he is going to utter? He thinks in terms of his message. From our experience we now think that in training first-line foremen it is better to approach the training in terms of functions of the job without too much emphasis on the number of separate tasks that go into the make-up of those functions. While the separate tasks cannot be ignored, they can be relegated to their proper places in the training sequence.

### **People Problem Is Greatest**

An examination of the tabulation shown in TABLE II reveals that the three groups vary in size. While the

technical know-how, practical experience, and procedural knowledge associated with any job are extremely important, they do not tell the whole story. Moreover, these are skills that can be learned with comparative ease probably because no job succeeds without them and also because industry has long provided and enforced methods of teaching and learning such skills. Yet when we come to those job requirements associated with people we find that the components are noticeably greater. There is a universality about these human factors that is applicable to any job whether it be production, scientific, staff, or higher management. People are pretty much the same regardless of their industrial level. They believe themselves to be unique. They usually want to take pride in their jobs; they want an opportunity to advance; they want to be recognized; and they want to be respected for themselves and for their abilities.

The greater number of tasks associated with people becomes impressive to first-line foremen. It gives them an inkling of what their jobs really are. Production quotas must be made, quality must be high, and costs must be low, but all of these requirements are met or defeated through association with people. Machines and procedures are standardized and are relatively stable, but the challenge offered to foremen usually comes through their human relationships.

We feel that an analysis such as described here helps the foreman to study and evaluate his job properly with due respect for those tasks falling into the general categories of operations, administration, and personnel.