



Measuring the quality of a shop's workplace culture goes beyond audit results and meeting product specs – it also entails asking a fundamental question ...

Friend or work colleague? Can they be both?

Some cultures focus on the fact that work is work. You keep your relationships at work separate from those of your personal life. In the bustle of production, there is little time for emotions or time to chat or gossip. When you are on the clock, parts must be heat treated, tested, and shipped to the customer. Hence, the entire work-life balance equation.

However, why should your relationships be viewed any differently when interacting with other human beings while at work compared to your friends outside of work? Especially when work consumes a good portion of your waking hours each week.

Today there is the increased pressure of producing and meeting the current expectations of getting planes to fly in the air with properly heat-treated parts. Expectations are to provide great quality and meet on-time delivery, all while keeping a smile on one's face for good customer service. The orders for parts are getting bigger, but the lead times are expected to be shorter with an increasing problem of hard-to-find workforce employees. Therefore, it is critical to view the heat-treat team as essential players in the game of manufacturing. To overlook your employees as an asset is a huge mistake for any company. One way to measure the quality of the workplace culture is to listen to the dialogue among the employees.

Do the conversations talk about how work relationships are nothing but transactions of employee numbers and serialized parts from the start and end of the processing? Is there talk about taking into consideration personal factors of the employees on their "good" and "bad" days of working? My most memorable experiences in my professional career in heat treatment have not only been in the challenging projects of building heat-treat departments from the ground up, revamping quality management systems, or leading professional teams through audits, but rather the people I have worked with and the quality of those relationships.

They say if you love your job, you will never work another day in your life. I believe, though, that something needs to be added to this. I've loved my job but have disliked working at certain places in the past. And it wasn't because of the work that I disliked it, because I have loved the work I have done over these years. Heat treating and the quality system requirements of aerospace have always fascinated

me. No, it was the people who either made my work meaningful, satisfying, and productive or made it long, frustrating, and unhappy. So, the people are a critical element to any winning heat-treat team.

And in reflecting why some workplace cultures resonated with me more than others, it was simply the fact that I had more "friends" at work. Friends who did play golf together after work. Friends who met for lunch and talked about our personal lives beyond the office walls. Showing pictures of family and trips they went on. Friends who could not only understand each other emotionally that day, but



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learn to work with each other beyond the mechanistic algorithms programmed by the company's organizational chart and job requirements. We saw one another as human beings with feelings, thoughts, and potential. Not bleak employee numbers, throwing salary and dollars at, with unrealistic company goals.

In philosophy of mind, there is an ongoing debate about whether humans have consciousness. Whether we are robots or humans with this "special something" we call consciousness. I sit in the camp of



tions are not suitable for the workplace. Yet, it is hot and cold temperatures that heat treat parts. It is the emotions of anger and patience that really must be regulated into the motivation of individuals on the floor as they are loading and unloading baskets. Operating heat treat isn't so bleak as running three baskets in a batch furnace for one-and-a-half hours and oil quenching it out of the endothermic atmosphere environment, followed by a deep freeze and temper thereafter.

John or Susan wants to be heard on the workshop floor. Even the interactions of "how was your weekend" during the setting up of parts can set a tone. Or, "did you catch the football game" chatter while waiting for the last few seconds of the timer to go off prior to quenching. They aren't long conversations. But these interactions add up in the quality of the relationships in the department.

Therefore, the true measure of a heat-treat team shouldn't just be in the "workplace" connections through an organizational chart or as employee number transactions in payroll every two weeks. Rather, the question for organizations to ask is, "how many friends do people have in the workplace?" This provides better insight as to the "quality" of the workplace culture. And as I remember on my cafeteria wall in elementary school, "rooted in friendship, growing in knowledge". Root the heat-treat department in friendships, and not only will the parts get processed more efficiently, the company and the respective employees will all grow. This benefits everyone. 🌱



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free will, meaning that our lives are not all predetermined. Unlike the company's procedures and forecast plans for what heat treat will be running for the week, I don't believe our personal lives are this black and white, easily forecasted for next year's business plan. Rather, employees are autonomous and capable of their own decisions.

Professor David Chalmers uses the word "qualia" to explain consciousness beyond the deterministic point of view. How can you describe how a robot can taste a juicy apple? How can managers of the heat-treat department interact with their team to not be robotic? Managers and leaders must make the relationships "juicy" to the extent that there are meaningful connections. This qualia, is a certain "quality" that is required for heat-treat departments to be successful.

Friendship isn't just about being able to disclose your deepest and darkest secrets. Workers today fall under this impression that emo-

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