

Avoiding summer burnout

by E.T. Wandtke



I arrived at the office on Monday at 7 o'clock. It was already 82 degrees outside, and the weatherman was predicting a high of 95.

My truck would not turn over. Frustrated, I went back into the office to call the mechanic. My plan was to have him come over with tow truck and tools. While waiting in the office, I received two phone calls from employees who said they would not be in.

And so, I knew, it would be a long week.

■ Many of us have been faced with similar situations. Typically, they result from five symptoms: high temperatures; overworked employees; long days; employee turnover; and equipment failure.

The key is to spot the symptoms before they occur, and prevent problems.

Keeping productivity up—Productivity during extremely hot days typically

falls, but it can be recovered.

Two tips to remember when you are faced with hot, unpleasant temperatures:

1) Provide your employees enough water to replenish lost fluids. A large cooler like those used by football teams is ideal. Water on site will reduce the need for your mobile workers to stop for a drink, and thus increase their efficiency.

2) Provide fruit for your employees to snack on. One banana can supply many of the essential nutrients needed for peak performance. Fruit while in transit will replenish sugar the body needs faster than cookies, candy and doughnuts.

Overtime and turnover—Turnover starts when employees work excessive overtime many weeks in a row.

However, workers in this industry typically know that overtime is unavoidable. So they pace themselves for a 10-hour day instead of an 8-hour shift. This can actually lead to a decrease in efficiency during the 8-hour shift. To prevent this, you may need to plan in advance to hire additional help.

Planning what needs to be done in a given week helps you organize your crews efficiently and productively. After the plan has been drawn up, delegate weekly responsibilities to crew chiefs. This will motivate them to work harder, since they have a goal. In return, managers will have more time to concentrate on office work.

Should you hire more help? A few more employees might help smooth out your work week. Part-timers can revitalize the crew and reduce overtime.

Let key employees have a week off during the summer. It's an excellent reward that will allow you to evaluate crew efficiency.

Reasonable expectations—Employee turnover results from being "overworked and underpaid," and from a lack of desire to work (the unavoidable quitters).

To help minimize turnover, establish realistic expectations each week, and reward the crew when the job is done.

Incentives should be simple and quick, like daily attendance, weekly production efficiency, and safety/maintenance contests. Keep employees' minds off the weather and focused on the work.

Don't be a stranger—Keep the channels of communication open.

A simple greeting can go along way. Respect and positive feedback can keep morale high and keep employees excited.

Reducing equipment failure—Equipment breakdown is the stress factor that's easiest to avoid.

Cleaning and maintaining equipment will not only save you the hassle of breakdown, but will also increase the life of your equipment.

Much of this maintenance may take as little as 5 or 10 minutes a day. Simply checking to make sure everything is clean and all fluid levels are correct can save money in the long run.

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