

MARKETING FOR JOB SHOPS: INTRODUCING NEW IDEAS

SUMMARY

This BMA will discuss our need to continually and properly introduce new technology into our shops if we expect to survive the “High-Tech Explosion.”

New equipment must be accepted by our people. Today, with high-technology equipment coming as never before, we must try to develop methods of introduction that are accepted and embraced by our office staff, our machinists, and our managers. Realistically, it is difficult for us to change from a successful way of doing things to what will be an even more successful way. We all like the old chestnut, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

But the pace at which new high technology is being developed for job shops is staggering. We simply must introduce change, or we will inevitably be lost in the shuffle. If a definition of high technology is “the linking of computers to mechanical devices and machines,” job shops are one obvious target market for high-tech.

There are rules for introducing change, just as there are rules for many of the other things we do in our businesses. Introduction of new technology will change many of the tasks and responsibilities our people are accustomed to. How do we handle such changes?

First of all, we must understand that people will not usually accept new procedures readily—they must be “sold” on change. I recall the resistance some shops faced in trying to introduce NC or CNC machines. I’m told that some pleasant people became sullen; and that scornful and mocking comments were sometimes heard.

If we had done a superior job of explaining exactly why we needed to install the new equipment, what it could do for us, who would be affected by it, how they were most likely to be affected, and exactly when the equipment would arrive, we would have had fewer problems. People always accept change more easily when they understand all the ramifications of the change well in advance.

Security is one of our most basic needs, along with safety. When people see their employer making changes, but don’t understand the changes, they become concerned about their jobs. We must anticipate such concerns, and do something to show that the changes will provide better opportunities and improved incomes.

New, high technology equipment usually can’t be installed on the spur of the moment, it requires lead time. Planning can be done well ahead of time. Since most people will accept changes more readily if they know the changes are well planned, make sure that your people do know all about such plans early-on. In many cases you can involve the affected people in the planning process; that’s even better.

Of course, this risks having one of your key people get his back up and come out against the idea. One can usually avoid this by carefully thinking things through ahead of time, and approaching that person privately to involve him and show that you value his cooperation. Total honesty is of utmost importance in this, as any attempt at manipulation will only harden the opposition to the change and make it tougher to do.

Once you have established and nurtured a climate for change in your organization, you will find that new technology - more changes will be more easily accepted. For this reason, it is best to start with one new item, let your people get used to it, and then introduce the next. More than one new piece of high tech equipment at a time will only cause confusion, unless you install it in a completely new department with different people.

So, if you wish to have support for introducing new technologies in your shop, plan as well as you can, make sure that you help your people understand exactly what is happening, try to eliminate concerns about jobs, and make one change at a time. It’ll work!

Any time something new is introduced in an organization, the very first thing people look for is the commitment level of management, so make sure your people see that you are investing your own best effort and the needed time in planning and in implementing the changes. Otherwise they won’t give it their best effort either.

Remember that you have been visiting tool shows for years, that machinery and systems salespeople show you their wares, and that you are reading the literature about new equipment everyday, while the people in your organization probably have not had such exposure. Communications channels must be established within your company to assure that everyone concerned is fully informed.

Your employees deserve a chance to accept new technology psychologically before they must accept it in their workplace.

Individuals differ in learning methods; some learn things easier and faster by reading while some need to listen to explanations. You must provide information through both channels.

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