



Activity - The Case of Motivating Mike Moran

Mike Moran had Burt Hall baffled. How can you accuse one of your better producers of loafing on the job? Yet that's what Burt had to do. Ever since taking over Assembly Department B, Burt had had his eye on Mike. In fact, long before he became a supervisor, Burt had noticed the way Mike worked, and didn't work.

An exceptionally friendly and talkative man, Mike bothered Burt by his frequent practice of stopping his whole crew to tell them a joke or a story. It didn't bother Mike that it was during working hours or that anybody might be watching. He just seemed to enjoy telling stories and being the centre of attention. The trouble was that the rest of his gang enjoyed him too. That's what made it tough to clamp down, there was no chance of using group pressure on him, for Burt had tried that with a marked lack of success.

Soon after he took over the Department, Burt was determined to straighten that crew out, but he waited a couple of months before moving in. Because Mike was such a friendly guy, Burt was sure that he'd have no problem motivating him to get on the ball. The crew was on a group incentive so Burt thought it wouldn't be hard to get them to see how much they were losing by standing around and talking. He waited for an opportune time to launch his campaign.

One afternoon Burt heard the whole crew burst out laughing while he was standing nearby checking a job. As Burt walked over, Mike was holding the floor, telling one of his escapades. Mike held the complete attention of the crew, all were enjoying his performance. No-one seemed to mind that Burt had joined the group. Mike acknowledged Burt's arrival with a smile and a nod, but continued with his story; Burt interrupted by asking if anything was wrong. Mike caught the inference in Burt's question. Speaking for the crew, he assured Burt nothing was wrong and explained that he was just telling them about his last date. Sensing that Burt was annoyed, he also added that it could wait and that they would get busy. Mike, without question, was the informal leader of the crew. He had no formal designation as leader, but the crew followed him just as surely as if he carried the plant manager's title.

Mike's crew produced extremely well. When they worked, and that certainly was most of the time, they couldn't be equaled in their output. Burt had no quarrel with their total production. They were comfortably ahead of the other crews doing the same work. But the frequent non-scheduled breaks for storytelling did bother Burt. He reasoned that their production could be even better if they would stick to business. Their non-productive time could be converted into badly needed production. Further, if they kept busy, they wouldn't be setting a poor example for the other crews and the rest of the department. Mike was the pace setter for the crew, so Burt decided to start on him. The next morning he asked Mike to stop by the office during the break.



Burt started out by explaining that he wanted to talk about idle time. No sooner were the words out of his mouth than Mike asked if their production record was slipping. Burt had to acknowledge that it wasn't, but he said, "Mike, think of the money you could be making if you'd cut out the storytelling and keep that crew busy."

"What good is money if you can't enjoy it?" Mike asked. "I've seen too many people, my old man included, sweat their whole life away to rake in money. When they finish, what have they got? A lot of miserable years and no way of knowing how to enjoy what's left. No sir, Burt, life is too short to spend every minute of it trying to make more dough. I want to enjoy myself. We'll keep up our end of production, but don't ask me to go around with a long face trying to squeeze out that last drop of blood. We've got a good producing crew. We'll see you get a fair day's output."

"I didn't mean for you to drive them," Burt apologized. "I just meant that the time you spend horsing around could be put to better use. You could be making more money without working any harder—just steadier. You can still enjoy working, but you'll never get ahead if you don't take things more seriously. We're all here to produce. It looks like hell to have your crew sitting around gabbing when they should be working."

"Okay, Burt," Mike said, "we'll quiet down. If we aren't keeping up our end of production, you let us know."

The conversation hadn't gone exactly the way Burt wanted it to. He didn't anticipate that Mike would react the way he did to the chance to make more money. Things did improve for a while, but in a week or so the old pattern was right back where it had been. Burt decided that if he couldn't get to Mike, he would work around him. One at a time, he arranged to talk to Dave Bangs, Gladys Reed, and Manny Hill. The fifth member of the crew, Jane Shands, was relatively new, and Burt didn't think he should involve her.

The reactions of Dave, Gladys and Manny were the same. They all felt that it would be nice to be making more money. On the other hand, their incentive earnings were pretty good, better than those of the other crews. Besides, it was a lot of fun working with Mike. Each said they would try to buckle down and cut down on the talking. But the pattern of response repeated itself, first some improvement would be made, and then they gradually went back to their old habits. Burt was convinced that it wasn't malicious. They were doing a fine job on production. It was frustrating though, to keep knocking your head against a wall without getting any results.



As much as anything, Burt was worried about the appearance of things. He often wondered how he would explain how the crew could sit around laughing and talking if Oscar Palmer should happen to walk through while Mike was spinning one of his yarns.

Even if they were producing well, it would be hard to justify a party on the job. It might be even worse if some other high-ranking executive walked through at the wrong time. Burt was puzzled by his failure to motivate any of the crew. Why didn't they respond to the carrot he held out for them? Isn't everybody interested in more money? He remembered how he worked and how it paid off. Yet Mike showed no interest at all, and the rest of them were interested, but apparently not enough to put any pressure on Mike to stop horsing around. If a supervisor couldn't motivate his people with money, what in heaven's name was left?

Since it was obvious to Burt that he couldn't solve this problem by holding out the financial incentive to Mike and that his chances of forcing the issue with disciplinary action was not good, he searched for other alternatives. The only thing he could come up with was the possibility of using Mike as a utility man, transferring him to other crews. Maybe he could use Mike to spark higher productivity on other crews. There was no denying that Mike was a leader and that when he worked, he took everyone with him. The trouble with that approach was the risk of having Mike spread his practice of playing around. At least the way it was now, Mike only infected one crew. Perhaps containment was a wiser policy. But if Mike could generate higher production, it would really help. "With Mike's seniority, he couldn't be forced into a utility position," Burt thought. "You'd have to motivate him, and I'm right back where I started." Mike Moran had Burt Hall baffled!

Discussion Questions for "The Case of Motivating Mike Moran"

Working in groups, discuss the following questions:

1. Describe Burt's problem.



2. What might be some of the reasons behind Burt's failure to motivate Mike?

3. If the rest of the crew really wanted more money, why didn't they keep working when Mike stopped to tell his stories?

4. What can today's supervisor motivate their staff with?

Be prepared to share your thoughts with the rest of the class.



Facilitator's Notes:

Discussion questions for "The Case of Motivating Mike Moran":

1. Burt's problem: increasing the productivity of the other crews.
2. Mike is motivated by the social and ego-status needs.
3. The crew also wanted their social needs met. They looked at Mike as their leader.
4. Generate a list from the participants:
 - the better jobs
 - coffee
 - positive feedback
 - time off