

# Improving Relationships

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## ABSTRACT

People in the work environment (and often elsewhere) are seen as a commodity (we use them for our purposes).

The general accepted view of a Company is that shareholders are “The Company” and that they employ people to utilise their money in a particular field to generate more money to give a return on investment. To achieve this, capital equipment is purchased to fulfil a task and people are employed to use this equipment. Equipment and people are commodities purchased with money.

The focus of this approach is MONEY. The equipment and people, and the use of them, determines the amount of money that can be generated. In this approach people are motivated by financial concerns. The harder the times the more money becomes the focus.

In more recent times there has been a greater recognition of the role of people, and Human Relations has become an “In” phrase. Recognition of the cost a person and the degree of value of various individuals has prompted action to adjust the approach to people to get the best out of them. This has become a management technique and has led to a great emphasis on in employee selection, job descriptions, training, industrial relations etc. This approach is reflected in our current push for Work Teams. However, this view is still badly flawed as it still looks at people as a commodity that must be managed correctly to gain maximum benefit.

At Cornwall, a different approach is taken that on the surface may not seem so different, but it has a vastly different motivation and outcome.

## CORNWALL COAL APPROACH

### Management attitude

The foundation and focus of our operation is people. The basic philosophy is that “The Company” is the people who work together to fulfil a task. To do that work they need money. This is supplied by shareholders, who are entitled to a return on their investment.

People are important as individuals. They have feelings, needs and concerns. All of these express themselves in the workplace. Dealing with these is an essential part of living in any form of community, and our workplace is a community. The work we do is a means of addressing these issues and to do so requires helping one another. Of course we must give an adequate return on investment to fulfil our shareholders needs.

### Management technique

There are two opposing approaches to management. The first is the historical approach as already outlined. This is authoritarian and legalistic in nature and aims to control behaviour.

Under this approach a hierarchy of control is necessary with detailed instructions and regulations. A system of recording, reporting, written authorisations with an emphasis on disciplinary procedures should any failure occur in fulfilling the requirements. Taken too far, the effect is destruction of openness, relationships, innovation, flexibility and morale, and the development of mistrust. People hide their weaknesses and failures and learn to manipulate, to use the system, and to blame others. This is a destructive environment and leads to failure.

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Cornwall has taken an alternative approach which recognises the inherent value of people. Our aim is to build up and develop people and give them greater freedom in doing their work.

Under this approach we recognise that people are restricted in reaching their full potential as people. They generally carry rejection, emotional pain and many emotional burdens. They are happiest when operating at their full potential and living and working in a friendly environment.

In our endeavours to achieve the right environment we must be aware that just as there are laws dealing with our physical environment, eg The Law of Gravity, so there are laws that deal with the well being of people and the relationship between people. Unless those laws are recognised and complied with the outcome will be people who are emotionally disturbed and who react to many situations in an undesirable manner. Both individual and group achievements will remain well below their potential and damaging conflicts will continue.

The law I am referring to is the Law of Love. It is not because of legalism that Jesus Christ told us to love God and love one another. It was because he knew it was essential to our well being in all aspects of life.

We are dealing with people who have been hurt, abused, rejected and emotionally bruised. Many have been used, taken for granted. They cannot trust. All people to one degree or another utilise an instinct for self preservation. A surprising number of people think little of or despise themselves. All of these emotions reveal themselves in anger, bitterness, jealousy, resentfulness, envy etc and have serious consequences in both Safety and Industrial Relations as well as productivity.

Love is both a feeling and an attitude that expresses itself in practical ways. Some of these ways which are essential to a healthy working environment and which we have tried to cultivate are listed below

- Accept people as they are, warts and all. Do not rubbish people whether openly or behind their back
- Always treat people with respect. Be humble
- Decide to trust
- Forgive – we all need it
- Be open – admit your mistakes and failures
- Build up confidence and self esteem
- Give responsibility, authority, support
- Create a non-threatening environment, give freedom to make mistakes, remove fear of failure and the need for self defensiveness. Give freedom to make foolish suggestions, allow room for people to grow and mature
- A person's family and family needs are important. Do everything possible to accommodate them. Be interested in their family
- Treat injured people the same, whether compensation or not, wherever possible. Their needs are the same
- Try to place people where they are suited and want to be, if possible

We want people to enjoy work, to have self esteem, to have self confidence without pride, and to have concern and care for themselves and others.

To do all or even part of this is not easy. Our self interest, our weakness, our needs get in the way. Our reactions are often automatic and wrong. Our self preservation instincts are strong. Outside pressures and influences often dictate what can be done.

However by treating people correctly and by working on a persons needs we see growth, confidence, commitment, responsibility, openness and strong relationships. People are free to admit weaknesses and failures and they can work together to overcome them, supporting one another in the process.

This requires the Manager to adopt a leadership role. Their role is to give support and to act as a facilitator. Their emphasis is on developing people as individuals and their relationships with others, because they care about them as people rather than as commodities.

## MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Under this structure our Managers work as a team but have full freedom as individuals to manage their areas of responsibility. Because of close liaison with other Managers, input is given by the others and a consensus of any overlapping issues is easily reached.

Managers have close contact with all their employees with only one intermediate leader operating within each group. This leader does not limit close communication with all individuals. Most decisions are made knowing the opinions of all concerned and are usually effectively, consensus decisions. This does not prevent unpopular decisions being made but because of the relationships that exist, they are generally accepted.

People at all levels can react quickly and confidently in any given situation because of their understanding of others and a confidence in their relationship. The management structure is set out in Fig. 1

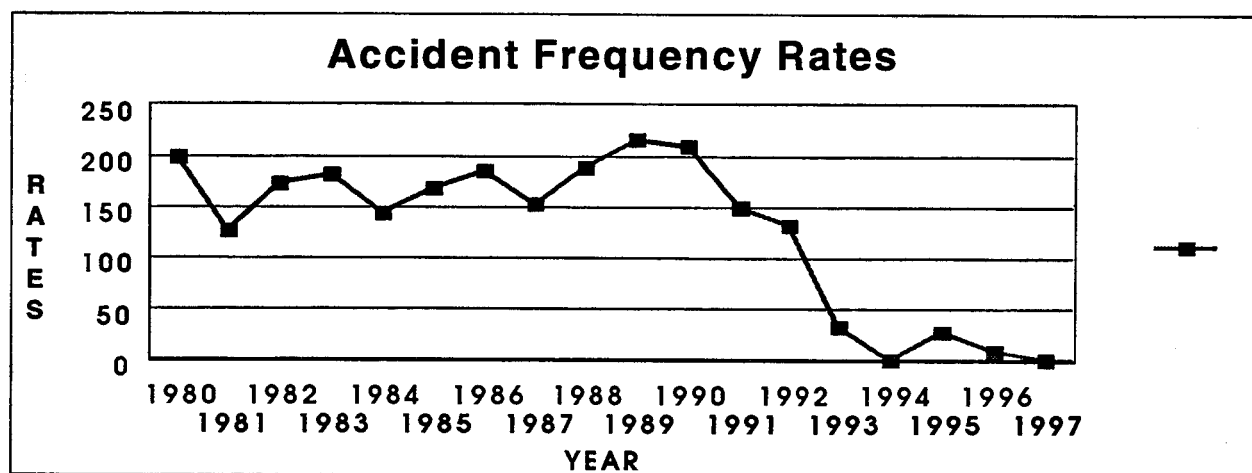


Fig. 1 - LTI frequency rates 1979 - 1997

### Employee training

Little training existed before 1991. Training was generally by on the job coaching.

Two areas of training occurred in 1991/92 which together changed relationships

1. Team training which involved managers, staff and crew members in small groups. This was introduced following recognition that despite the best intent of all parties, there was obviously a lack of trust and understanding that needed to be dealt with. As the operation had gone through a period of growth over the previous decade, communication has suffered and with it relationships were becoming strained
2. Work model training at level "0" for all employees. This again involved small groups comprising a cross section of all employees and was presented by the Managers. This did require policies to be developed on paper, a situation that did not pre-exist. The training was introduced as a result of the development of the Underground Work Model and the realisation that our people had no formal training and a lot of their understanding was based on outdated theories and beliefs. It was decided to start from basics for all employees.

The close liaison that occurred during this training had a major impact on understanding and appreciating one another and in breaking down barriers.

Further training continued in the areas of:

- Leadership Workshops. First line supervisors with the Manager and Engineer met under an external facilitator to further understand and appreciate each other and create a team environment at that level
- Technical Work Model Training. This is given by the Managers whenever possible to further develop closer relationships with outside support only when necessary
- Deputy Training. Out of 28 mining employees, 6 are qualified as Deputies and a further 8 are in training. Previously there was an unwillingness to take on the responsibility because of the small community and social separation caused by promotion. There was also a reluctance to take on what was seen as an onerous responsibility. Because the relationships between Deputies and their crews is now based on leadership, promotion does not create social separation. Because Deputies are supported in their jobs and encouraged, the responsibility does not appear as onerous. As a result people are keen to advance and gain the financial benefit.

### **Employee involvement**

Encouragement is given to employee involvement in the following ways:

- Consultation Committee - Comprises all four Managers, one staff representative drawn from Administration, one Washery representative, two Underground representatives, the four representatives being elected by their workmates.
- This meets bimonthly to discuss broad issues and was responsible for preparing the Enterprise Agreement. Any major issues go to the workforce with a consensus recommendation.
- Team Leaders Meeting (at the Mine) - Comprises the Manager, the Engineer in Charge, the electrical team leader, mechanical team leader, and the four permanent deputies. This meets fortnightly to discuss operational issues including planning, performance and costs.
- Safety Committees - Meet six weekly, one at the mine and one at the Washery. Again these comprise a good cross section of employees.
- Crew Discussions - These are all held whenever necessary to provide information to employees where notices are inadequate such as market and contract information, and also where discussion is recommended by the Consultation Committee to include all employees. They are addressed by the Manager and are limited to major issues to ensure clear and uniform communication. Daily contact with the sharing of information as appropriate occurs, limiting the need for formal meetings.
- Others - All employees are involved where appropriate to develop changes such as machine modifications and operational changes. This includes interstate visits.

### **Enterprise agreement**

This has been operating since September 1994. The major changes to the Award and previous practices have been

- Introduction of the Work Model - Level four wages were paid to all employees upon the introduction of the Enterprise Agreement on the achievement of 20% productivity increase. This occurred immediately. There was a commitment to follow up with training as quickly as practicable. Due to operating pressures training has been patchy.
- Working Hours - Four day week comprising 4 x 8½ shifts changing at the face, plus one hour accumulated to give 47 hrs/year nominally for training. Ten public holidays paid at 8½ hrs/day. Annual leave and sick leave is

accumulated as per the Award but paid at 8½ hrs/shift absent. Production crews work Monday to Thursday. Maintenance crew work Tuesday to Friday.

- Operating Hours                      Production 7.00am Monday to 7.30am Friday  
   Maintenance 7.00am – 3.30pm Friday  
   Overtime Production Sunday nightshift and Friday dayshift as required.  
   Training Friday dayshift each crew 6 days/year.
- Sick Leave - Five days permitted to be taken as personal leave. Proportion of sick leave payout annually and limited by compensation claims.
- Compassionate Leave - Includes Grandparents and excludes Pressing Domestic Leave.
- Allowances - A fixed payment automatically paid on attended days.

The aim has been to simplify provisions to eliminate causes of conflict.

## Recognition

Appreciation of effort is shown in the following ways:

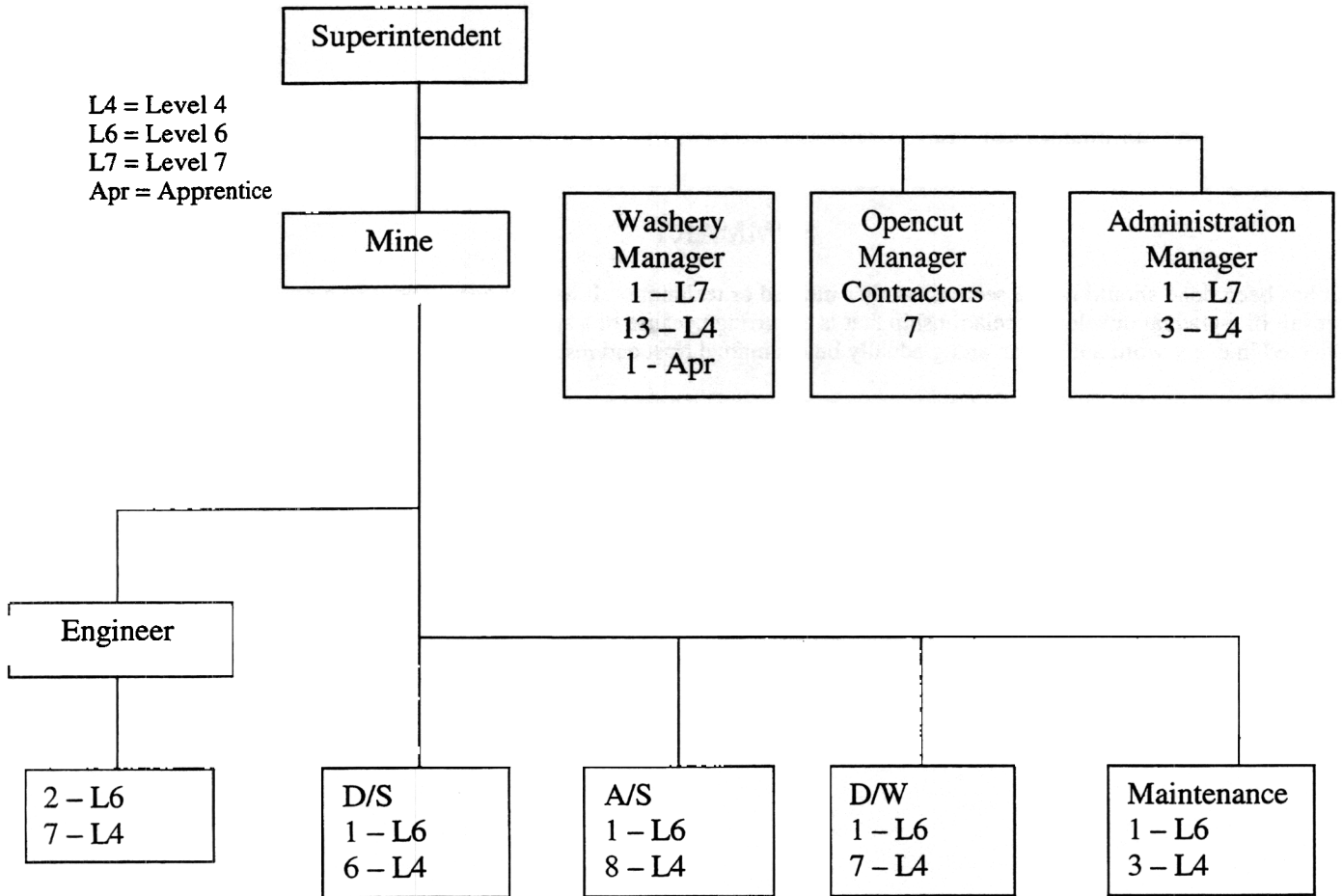
- Safety - A dinner including partners occurs on the achievement of 12 months Lost Time Injury free (now 3 occasions) plus a nominal award is given.
  1. Production  

Those involved receive a Gift Voucher when a record is broken for either a shift, a day, or a 12 shift week.
  2. Individual Effort  

A point is made of recognising effort by verbal appreciation and thanks.
- Union Representatives - All union representatives at the mine are Level 6 Team Leaders. That is, Operational Leaders are also the natural leaders.
- Evidence of Success
  1. Safety – (Fig. 2)  

Last underground Lost Time Injury (38 employees), 12 July 1995  
Last surface Lost Time Injury (23 employees and 18 permanent contractors), 16 May 1992

Our safety standards have been recognised by the Mines Department three times in the last four years as the Safest Underground Mine in Tasmania and this is reflected in our relationship with the Department.



**Fig. 2 – Management structure**

2. Productivity – Underground

Employees 38

Budget Production 1, 950 tonnes per day or 354, 900 tonnes per annum

Actual Production 12 months to 31 October 1997 406, 144 tonnes - equivalent to 10, 688 t tonnes per man year

3. Industrial Relations

Excellent. Although Cornwall has a long history of no Industrial Lost Time it has often been alleviated by considerable discussion with Union representatives and Union meetings. It is now rare to have formal meetings with Union representatives. Normal working contact deals with most issues.

#### 4. Deputy Positions

Providing all persons currently training complete their course 50% of underground production employees will be qualified Deputies.

#### 5. Rescue Team

Winners of the 1997 Tasmanian Mines Rescue Competition.

#### 6. Profitable Operation

### **SUMMARY**

What has been done should not be seen as another method or technique. It has not come about as a result of any plan but as a result of a gradual developing relationship that is occurring because of a specific attitude towards people. That attitude is reflected in every word and action and gradually builds mutual trust and respect.

Our industry operates in a difficult and dangerous environment. There is a need for standards to be set and complied with. There are many technical aspects that need to be understood and the knowledge applied in new and innovative ways. But the success of anything we attempt remains dependent on people and those who succeed will be those whose people are operating at their maximum potential. That potential can only be reached when we as leaders in this industry have the courage to love our people.

This requires personal risk taking, trust, hope and perseverance, a real commitment to the benefit of others before ourselves. It takes real courage. It's a big ask but with Gods help it can be done and we are rewarded by the release and growth we see in others, as well as success in our business.