

EMPLOYEE AND LABOR RELATIONS
STUDENT WORKBOOK

SHRMTM

SOCIETY FOR HUMAN
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Classism Isn't Classy:
Exploring Socioeconomic Diversity

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Classism Isn't Classy: Exploring Socioeconomic Diversity

INTRODUCTION

This case study explores the socioeconomic differences among employees of a family-owned pool and spa contracting and supply store. The enterprise employs a total of 53 workers: 20 skilled workers from the middle class, 30 unskilled workers who hail primarily from the lower class, and the family of three who owns the store and whose roots come from upper class. Due to high employee turnover, customer service complaints, scheduling overruns, low morale and frequent miscommunication, the company owners decide to conduct a team-building exercise to create more synergy and cooperation among the staff.

Students will participate in the case study by forming three groups. Each group will represent a different socioeconomic perspective. The groups will respond to the questions as directed in the learning assignments that appear in the case study.

Please note that this case study is intended for international use. The three major social classes may be labeled differently in the U.S. than in other countries. In some countries the three classes are known as poverty class, middle class and wealth class. The instructor should be at liberty to change the way the classes are referred to to reflect the language and titles commonly used in their region.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Undergraduate students.

TIME NEEDED TO COMPLETE THIS CASE STUDY

Three modules of 45-50 minutes each.

LEARNING MATERIALS REQUIRED

Student Workbook.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the case, students will learn how to:

- Define and discuss the labels assigned to socioeconomic classes and become familiar with the values, behavioral norms, traditions, ways of thinking, beliefs and attitudes commonly held in lower, middle and upper classes, and identify the ways in which socioeconomic perspectives affect attitudes about work.
- Anticipate and proactively respond to class differences that affect workplace performance, productivity, employee retention, employee satisfaction and customer service.
- Recognize the potential for cultural collisions between members of the three primary socioeconomic classes.
- Be aware of incentives and benefits that appeal to members of each class and inspire employee loyalty and enhance employee satisfaction.
- Collaborate with others to create and sustain a work environment that capitalizes and celebrates socioeconomic diversity, which results in service excellence to an organization's internal and external customers.
- Recognize methods and strategies used to evoke organizational culture evolution to suit the needs and sensibilities of today's workforce.

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Module 1: The Proud Peacock Pool Company

Instructions to Students

This case explores the effect of socioeconomic differences on the management and workforce of a family-owned pool and spa company located in the southern United States. Students will be asked to participate in the case by responding to the learning assignments found in this workbook. Prepare for lively discussions of the socioeconomic class differences found at the Proud Peacock Pool Company.

MEET THE PEACOCKS

Steeped in family history and pride, the Peacock family has been wealthy for three generations. Grandfather Edward Peacock was a filmmaker who made his fortune in the burgeoning Hollywood movie industry. After graduating from an Ivy League school with a business degree, Edward's only son, Charles, became a real estate mogul and married his wife, Cynthia. They have three children; Susan, age 26, Steven, age 29, and Stanley, age 32, all of whom were educated in the best private schools available. After their college graduations, each sibling was given a mansion to launch them into independent adulthood.

While renovating their new homes, Steven, Susan and Stanley all experienced the same frustration. None were able to find a suitable contractor to construct an in-ground swimming pool befitting their status and entertaining needs. One Sunday at family brunch, the three were complaining about the lack of upscale custom pool and landscape designers in the area. "How horrible," Cynthia commented. "Edward, give the children some money so they can open their own pool company and show these people in the South how to design and build a proper pool."

After a prolonged silence, Edward responded. "Here is what I propose," he volunteered. "I will put six million dollars in an account to fund a pool and spa company. The children must co-manage the company; it will force them to make good use of the education we provided them. Along with the money, I will put forth a challenge: within the next five years, I expect you to grow the company into a multi-state enterprise with a net worth of \$18 million. Do you think you are up to the challenge?"

"Of course," Steven spoke without a moment's hesitation.

"Let's do it!" Stanley chimed in.

"Prepare to be proud of us!" Susan promised. "I know a wonderful business consultant we can hire to help us put together a business plan."

Two months later, a business plan had been created with the help of a top consultant in the pool and spa industry. The company would include a pool and spa supply store in an upscale urban strip mall, a pool maintenance service, and a custom pool design and construction division that would integrate pool and landscape aesthetics into each project. The company would also maintain a strong Internet presence with a polished, user-friendly web site that would house an online store and a description of the company's pool construction and maintenance services. To further differentiate itself from the competition, the company would promise project completion in half the time required by its competitors.

MEET THE WORKFORCE OF THE PROUD PEACOCK POOL COMPANY

Ten months after that fateful Sunday brunch, the Proud Peacock Pool Company opened for business. Word of mouth is a powerful marketing tool in the upper class, and soon the calls began to come in with friends, associates and extended family all inquiring about pool renovations and maintenance services. By the end of the first year in business, the company had a very busy workforce of 53 employees, including the owners, one design and landscape architect, three pool construction managers recruited from competing companies with the knowledge and experience to construct quality pools and spas, 10 store clerks, one store manager, one bookkeeper/payroll employee, five pool maintenance technicians, one Internet technician, five warehouse workers, and a construction and landscape crew of 23 (11 of whom were skilled craftsmen and 12 of whom were unskilled laborers hired through a local temporary staffing agency).

Stanley served as the company's chief financial officer, Steven was the general manager; and Susan was in charge of human resources. Employee benefits included health insurance, provided at an employee cost of \$150 per month; a 401(k) plan; two weeks of paid vacation; and five days of paid annual sick leave. Salaries ranged from minimum wage for clerks and construction laborers to \$125 per hour for the architect's services. Skilled laborers made \$25 per hour, and supervisors were paid \$45 per hour. Overtime pay was available to compensate workers when short deadlines required long hours to bring a project in on time.

Monthly staff meetings were held, and all employees were encouraged to contribute agenda items for discussion. The first few meetings went smoothly. The company's clients were happy with the progress made on their projects; the work teams were getting along well together; and the Peacocks appeared to value the occasional suggestions submitted by the staff. When customer complaints began to trickle in, however, the tone of the meetings changed, and grumblings could be heard in the hallways as unhappy workers discussed how little their contributions were valued. Meeting attendance waned, and soon the minimum wage workers passed on the meetings entirely, even though attendance was considered mandatory.

CLASS COMPLAINTS DISRUPT TEAMWORK AT PEACOCK POOLS

With tensions mounting, the Peacocks decided to clamp down and insist that every employee attend the next staff meeting. Those who didn't attend were threatened with termination. Susan opened the meeting by distributing a list of customer complaints received in the past month:

- There are muddy tire tracks on my driveway. Please clean up your mess before leaving each evening.
- The port-a-pot at the back of my lot is smelly and unattractive. Remove it.
- I saw a worker drinking from my water hose. He should bring his own water.
- I hear swearing and shouting coming from the construction workers, and it makes me feel fearful and nervous.
- A store clerk ignored me while she talked on the telephone for five minutes when I was trying to check out.
- My pool man arrived to clean my pool attired in blue jeans and a ratty T-shirt. I was embarrassed in front of my bridge group.
- The pool installers smoke cigarettes, chew tobacco and spit on the ground. Yuck!
- Your crew arrived 10 minutes late last Tuesday with a lame excuse about the public buses running behind schedule. They should plan ahead.
- I ordered pool chemicals from your web site and the box came bound in layers of wrinkled tape. It took me five minutes to open it. Please take more care when boxing my delivery.
- One of your workers stole my ficus plant. I was promised that my old landscaping would be destroyed in a chipper. I caught him taking it home to re-plant in his own yard. Fire the thief.
- Your crew blasted horrid music from a boom box while working. I even saw them dancing and singing out there. Make it stop.

"Well, what do you think?" Susan asked after reading the list aloud.

"This is what I think," said a laborer who had never spoken at a meeting before. "I ain't workin' for snobs no more!" With that, he balled his copy of the list and made a perfect rim shot into the wastebasket.

"You said it, brother," chimed in a second crewman as he headed toward the door.

"Wait for me!" exclaimed a third.

"I was helping another customer on the phone when that pushy woman demanded that I hang up and tell her which aromatherapy scent would be best for her hot tub!" the clerk spoke up. "C'mon fellas, I'll buy the beer." In her haste to leave, she overturned her chair, then kicked it aside as she exited. Four more workers stood up.

“Just hold on!” Steven ordered, with a panicked look. “There is no need for violence!”

In response, the departing staff broke into laughter. “You wanna see some violence?” a laborer taunted.

“No, no I don’t,” replied Steven, “I want you all to sit down, take a deep breath and retain your composure.”

Another burst of laughter shattered the moment of silence that had fallen on the room, and the four workers left arm-in-arm singing loudly. “Take this job and shove it, I ain’t workin’ here no more...”

“I don’t get it,” Stanley said. “Those people really need their jobs, and these customer complaints are easily fixed with some manners and common sense!”

“Boy, you really don’t get it,” said a clerk. “We don’t live in your world, and we don’t understand your ways any better than you understand ours!”

More than a little uncomfortable, a construction manager spoke. “Let’s find some middle ground here,” he offered.

“Yeah, you middle class folks are big on finding ways to kiss up to the man without ticking off the little people, aren’t you? I’m not sure who you are more afraid of, Mr. Middle Man!”

Feeling there was no way to gain control of the meeting, Susan adjourned the gathering and motioned to her brothers and managers to stay behind.

“Now we know why the poor will be with us always,” Steven sighed as he sunk into his ergonomically correct executive chair. “They will take any little excuse not to work for a living!”

“Don’t be so hard on them,” Susan said. “It must be very difficult to be a member of the lower class.”

“I think they call it poverty class now,” Stanley volunteered. “It is wealth class, middle class and poverty class, with the middle class being divided into three segments, upper-middle, middle-middle and lower-middle.”

“Call them whatever you want, we have more turnover with our minimum wage employees than in any other sector. We’re about to go over budget, and we need minimum wage labor. I guess we will just have to get used to their irrational behavior.”

“Maybe there is an alternative,” suggested a crew manager. “At my old job, they made us attend cultural sensitivity training. We learned how to respect the contributions of all of our workers. We even restructured our benefits package and adjusted our company culture to meet the needs of the entire workforce. The effort paid off; turnover decreased, morale and camaraderie improved, and customer complaints diminished significantly. Our crews became more productive when we

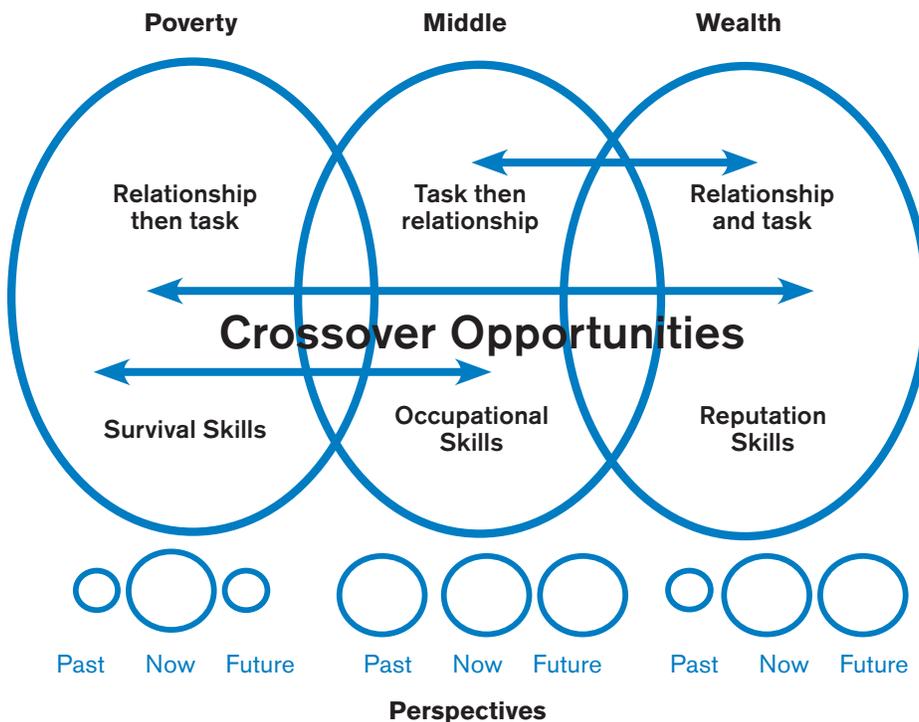
developed new strategies to motivate performance, and the workplace got to be more fun when we all learned how to appreciate each other.”

“Are you saying that we have a diversity problem here due to socioeconomic differences?” Susan questioned.

“Each of the three classes live by very different norms, employ different survival skills and live by a different set of unspoken rules,” the manager responded. “In our training, we learned that class affects a person’s thinking and behavior to a much greater extent than does race, gender, ethnicity or disability. When a family has lived in a given social class for two or more generations, class-specific perspectives become deeply ingrained in their habits and points of view.”

After a bit more discussion, the management team decided to retain the services of a diversity consultant to identify ways to develop a more inclusive organization. The consultant met with the managers the following week. The meeting concluded with a short-term plan. A team-building event based on the following model was planned:

The Social and Economic Model (1997)



In a poverty culture, the better an individual’s relationship needs are met, the more valued the person tends to feel and the more task-focused he or she will become.

Living constantly in survival mode, an individual is far more concerned about today than yesterday or tomorrow. In a barter economy such as exists in the poverty class,

if one is able to establish a network through relationship building, he or she stands a much better chance of getting survival needs met. Without money, individuals must often depend on trading one resource for another to meet basic needs. Those living in poverty rarely cross paths with those with wealth and are unaware of the hidden rules of middle and upper class societies that influence development of successful working relationships with members of those groups.

Members of the middle class generally tend to assess others on competency factors associated with getting the job done, whether at work or at home. Both people skills and technical skills are highly valued in most middle class occupations, so members of the middle class expect that a sound set of occupational and social skills will lead to their success. Their self-esteem helps them overlook slights that they may experience in the workplace, and they will consider both their past and future when deciding how to confront a situation. Members of the middle class have opportunities to interact with those from both the lower and upper classes from time to time and have at least a cursory understanding of how those in the other classes live, although they are not above judging those from other classes as being wrong, not merely different, in the ways they operate.

Those with wealth seldom cross paths with those from the lower class culture and interact with the poor primarily through middle class liaisons such as middle managers, attorneys, charities and law enforcement. For the generationally wealthy, the past takes on less importance than future opportunities and the present situation. Maintaining one's reputation is vital to retain and build wealth, so activities relating to attainment of self-actualization and legacy building are paramount in the thinking of the wealthy. Wealth allows the rich to self-actualize by becoming experts at anything that interests them.

The goal of the Proud Peacock's team-building session was to discover information about its workforce and to learn how to improve both employee and customer satisfaction. Making those from the poverty class feel valued, enabling middle class employees to feel competent and satisfying the wealthy customers who wanted to feel well-served by a reputable company were some of the goals set for the session. A "Could You Survive..." quiz was on the top of the agenda to open up the dialog among all employees.

LEARNING ASSIGNMENT 1: COULD YOU SURVIVE IN ANY CLASS?

Below are three short quizzes adapted (with permission) from the book *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. These quizzes present some of the skills needed to survive in poverty, middle class and wealth cultures. Please take a moment and check all of the skill sets that you, the student, possess. Could you survive in any of the three classes?

Put a check by the items you know or know how to do.

Could you survive in poverty?

- ___ 1. I know which Goodwill and Salvation Army stores have the best sales.
- ___ 2. I know how many visits you can make to a food pantry before you are not welcome to come back.
- ___ 3. I know how long you can stay in a homeless shelter before you are asked to leave.
- ___ 4. I know which restaurant's garbage bins can be accessed for food and what time each day the best food is available.
- ___ 5. I know what kind of collateral a bail bondsman will accept.
- ___ 6. I know how to fistfight or use a weapon to defend myself and am willing to do so.
- ___ 7. I know where to get a gun even if I have a police record.
- ___ 8. I know how to live without a checking account and credit cards.
- ___ 9. I know how to live without electricity, running water, cable TV and a phone.
- ___ 10. I know what to do when I don't have money to pay the bills.
- ___ 11. I know how to move in the middle of the night without a truck.
- ___ 12. I know what can and cannot be purchased using food stamps.
- ___ 13. I know where the free medical clinics and soup kitchens are located.
- ___ 14. I know how to trade and barter to get most of my needs met.
- ___ 15. I can get by without a car even if public transportation is unavailable.
- ___ 16. I know how to raise money in two days to cover the cost of a funeral.

Could you survive in middle class?

- ___ 1. I know how to enroll children into Little League, piano lessons, soccer, etc.
- ___ 2. I know how to properly set a table.
- ___ 3. I know which stores are most likely to carry the clothing brands I wear.
- ___ 4. The children in my family know the best brands in clothing.
- ___ 5. I know how to order in a nice restaurant.
- ___ 6. I know how to use a credit card, checking and savings accounts.
- ___ 7. I understand term life insurance, disability insurance and a 20/80 medical insurance policy, as well as homeowner's insurance, flood insurance and replacement insurance.

- ___ 8. I expect my children will go to college.
- ___ 9. I know how to get one of the best interest rates on my new car loan.
- ___10.I understand the difference between the principal, interest and escrow statements on a house payment.
- ___11.I know how to help children with their homework and do not hesitate to call the school if I need additional information.
- ___12.I know how to decorate the house for the different holidays.
- ___13.I know how to get a library card.
- ___14.I know how to use the different tools in the garage.
- ___15.I repair items in my house almost immediately when they break or know a repair service and call it.

Could you survive in wealth?

- ___ 1. I can read a menu in French, English and another language.
- ___ 2. I have several favorite restaurants in different countries of the world.
- ___ 3. During the holidays, I know how to hire a decorator to identify the appropriate themes and items with which to decorate the house.
- ___ 4. I have a preferred financial advisor, legal service, designer, domestic-employment service and personal shopper.
- ___ 5. I have at least two residences that are staffed and maintained.
- ___ 6. I know how to ensure confidentiality and loyalty from my domestic staff.
- ___ 7. I have at least two or three “screens” that keep people whom I do not wish to see away from me.
- ___ 8. I fly in my own plane or the company plane.
- ___ 9. I know how to enroll my children in the preferred private schools.
- ___10.I know how to host the parties that “key” people attend.
- ___11.I am on the boards of at least two charities.
- ___12.I know the hidden rules of the Junior League.
- ___13.I support or buy the work of a particular artist.
- ___14.I know how to read a corporate financial statement and analyze my own financial statements.

THE RESULTS OF THE FIRST-TEAM BUILDING SESSION AT PEACOCK POOLS

Although some employees came to the team-building session with a less-than-enthusiastic attitude, all participated in the opening quiz. Not surprisingly, those from the lower class did well on the poverty section of the quiz but not the remaining two sections. Those with a middle class upbringing did well only on the middle class section of the quiz, and the wealthy owners excelled on the wealth section of the quiz.

“What have we learned from the results of our quizzes?” asked Susan.

“I think this shows that we don’t have much in common,” responded an employee who was raised in poverty.

“I disagree,” asserted a middle class employee. “I think it shows that we need to learn more about each other as people before we can work together and with our customers cooperatively.”

“I’d like to know how the cultural values of those who live in a different socioeconomic class vary from my own,” Stanley volunteered. “I have a chart here that the consultant gave us. May I pass it out and ask you to group together with those in the same social class as yourself and examine the tenets listed to see if they are accurate to your own experience with your culture?”

“It couldn’t hurt,” replied an employee from the poverty class.

LEARNING ASSIGNMENT 2: TENETS OF THE THREE CLASSES

Please divide into three groups, each representing a different social class. As a team, evaluate the table shown below about the social class you represent. Decide whether you think the descriptions listed are accurate or inaccurate. Be prepared to explain the rationale behind your decisions.

	Poverty	Middle Class	Wealth
Money	To be used.	To be managed.	To be invested.
Personality	For entertainment.	For acquisition, stability.	For connections.
Social Emphasis	Social inclusion.	Self-governance, self-sufficiency.	Social exclusion.
Time	Focused on present; decisions are emotional and survival-based.	Focused on future, investment, weighing of consequences.	Focused on traditions, history, decorum.
Destiny	Fate; can't do much to change things.	Choice; can change things with good choices.	"Noblesse oblige."
Language	Casual; language of friends.	Formal; language of business.	Formal; language of networking.
Family Structure	Matriarchal.	Patriarchal.	Depends on who has the money.
Driving Force	Survival.	Work, achievement.	Financial, political, social connections.

After a good deal of lively discussion, the groups agreed that most of the values stated about their cultures were common enough to be readily observable within their communities.

“So how do we make this discussion relevant to our work here at Peacock Pools?” Steven wondered aloud. “Should we change our operations to be more attentive to the needs and sensibilities of our entire workforce?”

“We should,” said the store manager. “We could begin by asking employees what they want and need that we are not currently providing.”

Everyone agreed with the store manager, and it was decided that another all-staff meeting would be held the following week to tackle the tough issues associated with employee satisfaction at the pool company.

Module 2: Converting Class Clashes to Cooperative Collaboration

The second team meeting began with coffee, donuts and fresh fruit. Susan noticed that she and her siblings opted for a cup of coffee while the middle class workers had coffee, fruit and one donut, if any. Those from poverty class ate several donuts and went back for second helpings of fruit. “It looks like someone missed breakfast at home this morning,” Susan joked with a warehouse worker.

“Today wasn’t any different than any other day,” the worker replied. “If I eat at home, there isn’t enough food for my kids. When school is out, they don’t get the free breakfast served there, so I have to buy cereal and it is almost \$5.00 a box now. I can’t afford more than one box a week, and I have three boys.”

Stunned, Susan replied, “You mean we are paying you so little that you must depend on social service assistance?”

“Lady, even with what you pay me I need help to pay my utilities. I also have a rent subsidy and receive some food stamps. Plus, my wife is on a program that buys dairy products for mothers and children, and we get medical cards for the kids. As a matter of fact, when I got this job, they raised my rent from \$25 a month to \$425 a month, cut our food stamps by \$300, made me pay a lump sum of \$500 to reimburse them for the utilities subsidy. Plus, they took me and my wife off the medical card. I am worse off now than when we got welfare cash assistance.”

A pool technician from the middle class was standing nearby and overheard the conversation. “I have a second job myself,” he said, “and my wife works, too. I hardly ever see my family anymore. I know I make \$6.00 an hour more than minimum wage, but just filling up my truck to get to work puts a real dent in my wallet.”

“You mean you only have two jobs?” the warehouse worker teased. “My wife takes in laundry, babysits for the neighbor who works the night shift and waitresses at a diner. I tend bar at the VFW for tips, maintain some apartments and cut hair. Two of my boys have paper routes. It all pays under the table, thank goodness.”

Speechless, Susan made her way to the front of the room and opened the meeting. “We will begin today by talking about how we can better meet the needs of our internal customers, our staff. Please divide into three groups. Each group will make a list of five things that we could do to make our organization a workplace of choice for people who have life situations similar to your own. First, state the problem that is being addressed and then suggest a solution.”

The group divided quickly, breaking into factions that were congruent with their social class. The Peacock family joined the other managers, and everyone set to work

on their lists. Each group posted a list, as requested; their responses are contained in the tables below.

The management group posted their list first.

Problem to be Addressed	Possible Solution
1. Excessive absenteeism—sick leave is used as quickly as it is accumulated.	Require a doctor's excuse for each absence.
2. Tardiness—workers arrive late without notification.	Call in to the main office if you are going to be late for work.
3. Conflicts between workers interfere with productivity.	Report personal conflicts to managers for mediation.
4. Workers socialize excessively while on the job.	No personal phone calls, personal visits or social chats with co-workers except on breaks and lunch.
5. Employee theft of office supplies, discarded items and children's toys sold at the pool supply store.	Install more video cameras to monitor for theft in store and warehouse, and prosecute employees who steal.

The group composed of mostly middle class workers posted the following list:

Problem to be Addressed	Possible Solution
1. Limited opportunities for promotion.	Add another layer of management, front line team leaders.
2. Misallocation of resources; some resources are wasted while other needed resources are sparse.	Clamp down on wasteful habits, conserve resources, recycle and provide a budget for needed items so they can be purchased when needed.
3. Insults and teasing from co-workers—they never have a compliment for anyone.	Discipline staff members who are disrespectful to others.
4. Breaks and lunch; the smokers take more breaks than nonsmokers and some people sleep at lunch.	Everyone should be confined to two breaks daily (15 minutes each) and people should eat at lunchtime.
5. Safety on construction sites; loud music and co-worker clowning compromise worksite safety.	Use iPods for playing music and eliminate dangerous clowning and risky behavior.

The group composed mostly of poverty class workers made this list:

Problem to be Addressed	Possible Solution
1. Paychecks and bonuses are too infrequent.	Pay us daily or weekly instead of bi-weekly, and give bonuses monthly instead of annually.
2. Need notice of mandatory overtime in advance.	Tell us a week in advance when overtime will be required.
3. Flexible work schedule.	If we come in late or need to leave early, let us work through a break or stay late or come early to make it up instead of docking our pay.
4. Lack of trust; you think the customer is always right, and they aren't.	Ask us what happened when a customer complains, and stick up for us sometimes.
5. Arbitrary rules.	Don't consider taking discarded items as theft. Trash is treasure; when things are in the trash, they should be considered up for grabs.

where skilled workers and managers took unskilled workers under their wings to help them be successful in positions with greater responsibility.” A murmur of approval went up, and the suggestion was adopted. The remaining issues were then addressed by the full group, and the following solutions were devised.

1. Use and allocation of resources—wastefulness, misallocation, theft.

Construction crews and the store and warehouse employees will devise plans to conserve resources, such as utilities, scrap and supplies. The money each crew saves by making wise use of resources will be divided between employees at each work site in the form of a monthly bonus. Each site will keep a computerized inventory list and when supplies run low, automatic reordering will be triggered. Discarded items will be made available to workers who wish to take them home.

A company store will be established to sell office supplies, children’s toys, household supplies, gasoline gift cards and gift certificates to local eateries and entertainment establishments. Purchases will be made with performance points that can be earned for exemplary customer service and high levels of personal productivity.

Theft of company property, with the exception of discarded items, will result in termination and prosecution of the employees involved.

2. Work and pay schedules—tardiness, absenteeism, flex time.

Car pools will be formed to prevent tardiness due to public transportation delays. The company will provide drivers with a \$75 gasoline gift card each week to compensate them for their effort and added expense.

In lieu of a flex-time program, 16 hours of annual personal time will be added to the benefits package that can be taken in increments as small as one hour. Personal time can be used without explaining why it is needed. Sick time will be used only for personal or family illness, and efforts will be made by all employees to accumulate sick time and not use it as soon as it is accrued. Seven days of holiday pay will also be included in the benefits package.

Overtime needs will be determined two to three days in advance of scheduling the additional hours, and notice will be given to employees as soon as the decision is made.

Thirty minutes of break time will be available to workers each day. Workers can use the break time in increments of 10 or 15 minutes per break, to be decided at the worker’s discretion with approval of the supervisor.

3. Interpersonal relationships—socializing, conflicts, trust and teasing.

A committee with representatives from each social class will be formed to write guidelines for respectful communication. All workers agree to abide by the rules established by the committee and correct their own behavior immediately if it falls outside the guidelines.

Workplace socializing with co-workers will be limited to times when the team is not busy serving customers, and should not be excessive.

Trust in workers will be demonstrated by discussing customer complaints with the workers referred to in the complaint and deciding collaboratively about how the complaint should be handled. Workers will also be trusted to resolve their own interpersonal conflicts while adhering to the respectful communication guidelines being developed. Only when employees reach an impasse will managers become involved to help mediate disagreements.

4. Worker safety—risky behavior.

Worker safety is paramount. Risky or daring behavior has no place in a professional work environment. One's own safety and the safety of team members, customers and company property will be given top priority and will not be jeopardized by pranks, thoughtlessness or deliberate carelessness.

5. Employee benefits—pay and bonus schedule.

Electronic deposit of paychecks will continue to occur bi-weekly. Paper checks can be issued on a weekly basis at the request of the employee and picked up by the employee at the close of business each Friday. Employees will be paid quarterly bonuses as opposed to annual bonuses. Bonuses will be awarded based on meeting or exceeding project deadlines or sales quotas.

Module 3: Respect Is Basic to Inclusion

The two team-building sessions helped foster feelings of inclusion, even though compromises were made to adapt the wishes of the staff to competitive business practices. An unexpected hurdle arose, however, when the Respectful Communication Committee met to write guidelines.

“Respect means different things to different people,” observed one committee member. “While doing some research for this meeting, I found out that people who live in some cultures express affection through insults. Others give false compliments in order to get cooperation from others. In some cultures, overlapping conversation is the norm, while in others it is thought to be rude. How do we develop one set of guidelines that honor all culturally specific communication norms represented in our company?”

“I don’t think we have to do that,” replied another committee member. “I think we must decide what would be respectful in the context of our corporate culture. That probably means that everyone will have to learn some new communication skills to communicate effectively at work.” The others agreed, and soon a list of Respectful Communication Do’s and Don’ts that one committee member brought to the meeting was adapted to fit with the needs of Peacock Pools.

Do’s

- Use examples and anecdotes to explain your ideas.
- Understand the cultural styles of others and accept that their communication style might be different than your own.
- Make “I” statements, instead of “You” statements.
- Listen actively and demonstrate attentiveness by responding to what others are saying with receptive body language or brief comments that demonstrate understanding.
- Learn the values and assumptions of others and respect their frames of reference.
- Be aware of your values and assumptions.
- Distinguish between “thinking” and “feeling” statements.
- Demonstrate confidence in others.
- Practice constructive confrontation. Make sure your criticism is accurate, helpful, necessary and stated kindly.
- Observe others without condemnation.

Don'ts

- Say things about someone behind their back that you would not feel comfortable saying to them directly.
- Give unsolicited advice.
- Prophesize, preach or lecture.
- Hijack by one-upping others.
- Use reassuring squelches or patronizing tones.
- Use disclaimers, apologies and qualifiers that are self-effacing in nature.
- Contradict others without first commenting that you respectfully disagree before stating your own view.
- Interrogate others.
- Evaluate or judge others.
- Diagnose the cause of another's problems.
- Invade the personal space of others by standing closer than 12-18 inches from them during conversation.
- Touch others while communicating with them.
- Rush others as they speak or interrupt them.
- Engage in swearing, shouting or name-calling to express anger.

- The port-a-pot at the back of my lot is smelly and unattractive. Remove it.

Remedy: Keeping in mind neighborhood standards, we will construct a temporary privacy fence around the port-a-pot to contain odors and hide the facility from public view.

- A store clerk ignored me while she talked on the telephone for five minutes when I was trying to check out.

Remedy: When a customer is waiting, an employee will interrupt the phone call to reassure the customer that he or she will assist the customer momentarily, and then call for assistance from another clerk so that each customer receives the personalized service they deserve.

- Your crew insists on blasting horrid music from a boom box while working. Sometimes I even see them dancing and singing out there. Make it stop.

Remedy: Crew members who wish to listen to music will use iPods (iPods will be made available for purchase with performance points at the company store) with ear buds so they will still be able to attend to work site conversations without shouting above the music. Singing and dancing will be kept to a minimum so as not to disturb the customers.

The Peacock siblings were proud of the solutions generated by the employees and the respectful way in which employees worked to resolve the issues. “I think you all deserve a reward,” said Susan. “I know that most of you have never actually swam in a Peacock Pool. Let’s have a luncheon pool party at my house next month for our next team meeting. We will have a little fun and get a little work done. Bring your swimsuits.”

The Peacock Pools Employee Picnic

After a satisfying lunch and a rousing game of water volleyball, a short team meeting was held to discuss what else Peacock Pools might do to create a more inclusive organizational culture that capitalized on the skills and strengths of all employees. The following suggestions were offered:

- Hang a casual labor board in the break room where people can post advertisements for jobs they need done outside the workplace, such as house cleaning, babysitting and lawn care. Co-workers or their family members who have the skills and interest to do the job could respond to the postings.
- Start a barter club where goods and services could be traded to meet the personal needs of co-workers without a financial investment.
- Start a homework club where the employees’ children could meet to study together and tutor one another in subjects where some are having difficulty and others have high achievement.
- Provide free swim lessons to any employee or their family members who want to learn.

- Sponsor quarterly socials where all employees and their families are invited to participate in a fun, entertaining and inexpensive activity that will help employees get to know one another better.
- Change the food selections in the company vending machines to provide a mix of healthy snacks and not-so-healthy snacks to satisfy everyone's preferences.
- Provide bottled water, coffee and tea to all employees free of charge.

"I like it," said one minimum-wage employee. "I think these ideas will add to us all without subtracting."

"Subtracting?" asked a crew manager. "What do you mean by that?"

"When I have taken a job in a mainstream organization, I am usually required to change myself to the point that I no longer recognize myself," replied the employee. "They don't see that I have any strengths as I am; they just want me to be exactly like them. I like myself the way I am, and I don't necessarily want to change to be like them. They try to subtract away who I am and add who they are to me. This plan lets me contribute my skills to the company while adding new skills to my repertoire. For the first time, I feel like I am valued for who I am, not who others want me to be; and I have a chance to grow without compromising my identity."

"Very cool!" responded a pool technician from the middle class. "I think I will gain some skills and resources from this plan as well, so I am with you, I like it!"

"It works for me too," said Steven. "I really don't like it when my employees are dissatisfied, and I think adding these strategies to our corporate culture will produce greater harmony and prevent conflicts that disrupt productivity. Besides, some of these strategies sound like fun!"

Recommended Reading List

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