

Legacy Policies are Dead. Long Live the New Policies!

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Growing up, I learned that necessity is the mother of invention. During the recent COVID-19 crisis, many of us found out that necessity is indeed a cruel mother. Prior to the recent COVID-19 event, policies were firm, immutable, and not at all subject to interpretation.

"No cell phones. No exceptions."

"Office supplies are for the office. Offenders are subject to discipline."

Federal Policies

The federal government was a leader in firm policies; even if people were dying, typical approval times for new treatments and approvals at the FDA was measured in years.

- FDA had ironclad prohibitions against reusing PPE such as disposable facemasks.
- Using drugs off-label was also prohibited except in very limited circumstances.
- Getting approval to manufacture critical medical devices such as ventilators? Years to get approval.

And yet on March 28, 2020 the FDA authorized the use of antimalarial drugs, chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine, for emergency use on COVID-19 as clinical trials are ongoing. The FDA approved their use after determining that it was reasonable to believe they may be effective in treating COVID-19. This rapid decision-making was previously unheard of at FDA.

The FDA has also approved several new decontamination methods so that hospitals can reuse face masks needed to protect medical personnel. Somehow, Ford, GM, and Tesla jumped to the head of the line and got approval to start manufacturing ventilators.

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State Policies

My home state of Ohio has always had laws on the books prohibiting the sale and carry out of mixed drinks. The State of Ohio had special enforcement teams to investigate violations of their liquor control rules.

As of April 7, 2020, per Governor Mike DeWine's Executive Order, Ohioans can now get mixed drinks to-go with their carryout food order. And even have them delivered. According to the new rule, Ohio liquor permit holders are now permitted to sell up to two alcoholic drinks per meal for takeout or delivery.

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Shop Policies

Our shop policies going into this crisis were strongly held. The PMPA Human Resource ListServe had many

discussions about flexible work hours, working from home, and shop cell phone use (or even the very presence of cell phones!)

"Our hours are 8 Am to 5PM. No exceptions."

"Work is done at work. We do not have a work from home policy."

Now that COVID-19 has arrived, everyone that can work at home is working from home. Hours of work have become flexible too. We know of bank loan underwriters that were working around the clock to process the Paycheck Protection Program loans for which many of our shops applied.

"No cell phones in the shop. No exceptions."

The prohibition of cell phones in the shop has been interesting. With requirements to be at work (because

we are essential manufacturing workers doing essential work) and the need to communicate over the noise of operating equipment while standing six feet apart for mandatory social distancing, cell phones have become necessary. Many of our shops have relaxed their rules on cell phone use in the shop. “Now I can text over a photo of the problem and my team lead can text me their advice on what to try,” reported one PMPA machinist recently.

“Office supplies are for the office. Removing office supplies from the premises is a violation of our policies and will be subject to discipline.”

And now our shops have asked employees to take what they need to be effective working from home. Monitors, desk chairs, computer peripherals. Those would have been subject to disciplinary action in the days before our stay at home orders. Now they are not even worthy of attention.

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The Silver Lining

As all these policies fell, we have noticed some interesting developments. Productivity has actually gone up. We are

learning that fixed office hours aren’t as advantageous as having someone able to take that phone call from the West Coast even though it is past Eastern time zone office hours. I am sure there are more.

Bottom line is our bottom line — the downfall of some of our legacy policies has shown us new efficiencies, new ways to remain connected, new ways to collaborate, and new ways to still get the job done. For managers, the silver lining in the COVID-19 cloud is that we have seen our strongly held policies were not in fact helping us intelligently manage risk. They were handicapping our performer’s ability to operate efficiently and effectively. When we get to our new normal, we need to do more critical thinking about which of our remaining policies may be, in fact, hindering and not helping our performers and their performance.

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Miles Free III is the PMPA Director of Industry Affairs with over 40 years of experience in the areas of manufacturing, quality, and steelmaking. He helps answer “How?,” “With what?” and “Really?” Miles’ blog is at pmpaspeakingofprecision.com; email: mfree@pmpa.org; website: pmpa.org.

Like Feeds and Speeds, PMPA and you work Better Together

Precision Machined Products Association (PMPA) kept all members up-to-date on Covid-19 and SBA loan announcements. Members also helped members. This is just a small sample of how we work Better Together.



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