Case #4

# Case Abstract

Truss Right is a fictional company that has recently hired a new employee (the student) as Plant Coordinator. One main goal for the position is to increase workplace communication. It has become evident that the current communication system is malfunctioning due to poor equipment. Students working through this case are asked to write a decision report to management that presents options for the company.

**Keywords:** Decision Report, Persuasive, Communication, and Tools.

# Teaching Goals

The goal of this case is to teach students the importance of tools in a workplace environment that directly affect communication practices and respond by writing a decision report.

# Learning Objective

Students will:

* Assess workplace communication practices
* Analyze artifacts or tools that impact the work environment
* Evaluate employee complaints
* Write a persuasive proposal

# Possible Deliverables

* Decision Report
* Proposal
* Presentation
* Voice Recorded Proposal
* Video Recorded Proposal

# Outcomes

Students will have an understanding of communication in the workplace and how tools play an important role in that process by evaluating the situation presented in this case. Students will also learn from this case how to write a professional document that attempts to persuade an audience.

# Case Overview

Truss Right is a roof truss manufacturer in the Midwest that has been leading the industry since 1999. A small operation in Middletown, Iowa, this company has seen significant changes since the economic downturn in 2008 but has rebounded in recent years. You’ve been hired recently as the Plant Coordinator, a position that puts you as the mediator between employees and management. In your new position you are looking for ways to improve the workplace’s communication.

Communication in Truss Right’s facility is vital to the production process. Each work area is connected via walkie-talkie radios. The radios are Motorola brand that are at least 8 years old by your estimate. Maintenance showed you a box of spare radios, batteries, and microphone attachments that he says are all in non-working condition since he started 9 years ago.

There are four major work areas where employees need to use radios to connect with other employees: Yard Forklift Drivers, Lumber Pickers, Production Tables, and Maintenance. In total there are 10 portable radios with 5 employees wearing them with a belt-clip and the other 5 placed on a stand near production areas. All of the radios work on the same channel and can communicate with the main office where a radio acts as the hub for reaching any part of the shop.

## Problem

Employees complain that the radios fail to work most of the time. The batteries for the radios often die, and employees constantly walk to the office for a new battery or to other areas to use a different radio. When forklift drivers lose power on their radios they have to travel up to the office for a new battery. The production facility is a large, metal building that is extremely noisy during the day, and the plant is situated on 20 acres of land where forklift drivers spend their days. Employees say they have trouble hearing each other, especially when production areas try to call the forklift drivers outside. Employees say all they hear on the radio is static most of the time.

## Yard Forklift Drivers

The employees that work in the yard use their radios the most. There are 2 forklift drivers that wear radios to be in contact with everybody in the plant. The production tables that produce trusses call forklift drivers on the radio when a pick-up is ready to be moved out to the yard. The Yard drivers need to call the Lumber Pickers when more forklifts are need, such as when loading a truck. And finally, Yard employees have to be able to talk with the office for critical information, such as which job numbers need to be loaded onto certain trucks and when.

## Lumber Pickers

There are 2 forklift drivers that work in the lumber inventory area. Each of these employees wears a radio to be able to communicate with the Yard drivers. In addition, Lumber Pickers must be available for the 2 Saw operators if new lumber needs to be brought up to the line. Lumber Pickers also need to be available to the main office to ask for more work orders or to give a status update to the supervisor.

## Production Tables

There are a total of 3 production tables that have a radio on a podium located near the exit door where completed trusses are sent outside. Truss builders need to be able to call the Yard Drivers when truss bundles are ready for pick-up so that production can continue as scheduled. Also, truss builders often need to reach the Supervisor when they have a question about quality decisions.

## Maintenance

There is only one Maintenance employee, and he wears a radio so he can be available to any area in the plant. For instance, all forklift operators may need to call-in a breakdown with forklifts or a problem with a semi-truck; production tables have several pieces of equipment that could malfunction and would need repair; and the office will often call Maintenance with questions on billing for parts or alert him when there is a phone call.

## Your Task

The Plant Manager, John Harding, has given you permission to search for possible replacements for the current radios. Assess the current situation of the radios in the plant. After hearing from some of the employees, do some research and write a decision report for Mr. Harding to purchase new radios for Truss Right. The report should present radio alternatives, detail decision criteria, and recommend a radio to Mr. Harding.