

## Chris's Corner: Workforce Automation

In my industry in particular and in the service industry in general, there is a trend underway to leverage technology to enhance worker productivity. While attempting to get as much done in a day as possible makes all the sense in the world, at some point, however, you risk dehumanizing your employees in an effort to increase productivity.

Many businesses that own and operate vehicle fleets, regardless of in what capacity, are turning to GPS technology to ostensibly streamline their operations. In order to manage routes and traffic and avoid overlapping of resources, this makes perfect sense. Some operations take this technology to the extreme, monitoring every vehicle movement and stoppage and questioning the driver at their every move.

At some point, it often can take on a feel of big brother is watching you. If you convey to your employees that we don't trust you to do the right thing, perhaps it can result in behavior that justifies the scrutiny. If you are going to treat me like a criminal, I might as well behave like one.

I am on the road a lot. I stop for coffee and I stop to use the restroom and I don't check in with the office to let them know my business. I would assume my employees have the same needs as I do and I don't have a problem with them taking care of their personal needs because they can't take care of business for me, if I don't allow them to take care of themselves. They know when we are slammed with service calls and need to hustle; I don't need to breathe down their necks.

Many companies in the service business are also now utilizing mobile technologies where interface with the home office or dispatch is unnecessary. They get their calls, parts pricing and other pertinent call information over smart phones or laptops. A tech can spend his day, going from call to call, without communications to or from the home office.

Sounds great. Less time on hold. Get it done. But what about the feeling of isolation? What about feeling like another cog in the machine? I think one of the most significant parts of job satisfaction is that of being part of a team and that feeling of codependence, in that we are all in this together. What happens when that is lost?

The experience you give your employees in how you manage them is no different than buying a piece of equipment. You can buy off the internet or you can buy off a real, flesh and blood, salesman like me. If you can get the same end result with real human interaction versus a technical solution which would you prefer?

I guess what I am saying is that there is a real benefit to properly using technology, if it solves a problem or creates a benefit you wouldn't realize without it. However if you misuse the technology the hidden costs could end up cost you more.