

Working with Others

“When you have trouble getting out of bed in the morning, remember that your defining characteristic - what defines a human being - is to work with others.”

Marcus Aurelius Meditations 8.12

Some days I have trouble getting out of bed and do not want to work with others. As my colleague, Ali Gibson, sometimes remarks to me, “You seem a little cranky today.” I have been cranky on this day after the beginning of daylight saving time. What about you? Do you sometimes get cranky? Do you have trouble getting out of bed?

When I was a shiftworker, it was hard to get out of bed for the first day shift after a set of night shifts and a couple of off days. It was hard to get out of bed in the afternoon before night shift almost every time. I was often cranky. I did not want to interact with people.

Sometime about age 35, I began developing a personal mission statement, which included the concept of servant leadership. A key part of that concept is living in ways that benefit others. I have to keep remembering how I ought to live. Am I the only one?

One of the benefits of studying philosophy, particularly the Stoics, is that they remind me of the higher purposes of life. Implementing a Control Room Management (CRM) program requires working with others on numerous actions. We are still doing control room team training sessions, teaching skills that can help people work well with others.

Think about the parts of the CRM regulations that hint at the need to work with others. I will provide a few examples. In the “roles and responsibilities” section, there is a need to clearly define everyone’s responsibilities so that there is no confusion about who has the authority to make decisions, including providing directions. It requires how to address “temporary impromptu changes” when a controller needs some assistance from someone else. One of the newer requirements is to define the responsibilities of people other than controllers who can direct or supersede the actions of a controller.

In the “providing adequate information” section, there is the need for people in different groups to work together so that SCADA displays and other systems provide accurate and timely information, so that points in the field are verified in the SCADA system, and so there is a process for communications between people in the control room, the field, and SCADA personnel during a loss of communication.

In the “change management” section, there are requirements to work together on changes to pipelines and equipment. There are requirements for field personnel and SCADA personnel to notify controllers before making changes or performing maintenance. All of these examples necessitate working with others. And you can find other CRM examples.

If working with others is a defining characteristic of humans, how well do we embody that characteristic in our control rooms and in collaboration with controllers? Although the CRM regulations have no purpose related to what it means to be human, they can provide guidance as we work together with others to ensure safe pipeline operations. I encourage you to live in ways that honor your purpose in life. That might make getting out of bed a little easier. And we might be less cranky. Ali would appreciate that!