

## Successful Man Management in Silviculture

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Wainui Silviculture

Wainui silviculture has been established for three years and has built up a strong working relationship with Juken Nissho Limited of Gisborne in their East Coast district. Formed by Gary Smith in October 1996, Wainui silviculture currently has a solid stable of eighteen men pruning and thinning for Juken Nissho. We are also in partnership with one of our original foremen with a pruning crew of ten men, named K&S Forestry.

Right from the start, we knew that the management of men was going to be a major issue with running a contracting crew. After working as a pruner for three years and then spending eighteen months as a trainee supervisor for Juken Nissho, we already knew the difficulties of the job and the type of people that worked in it. Silviculture has a huge turnover rate in the East Coast district, it is not uncommon for men to change crews two or three times in a week. How many careers can boast the fact that employees can sway their employers over night, no questions asked just to suit themselves? As soon as their crew hits a block with blackberry for instance, no problem just go and work with someone whose still in the grass block, until they get a bit of blackberry and then move on etc.

Unfortunately Silviculture also has a wide spread drug and alcohol problem. Fortunately, the crews which let this type of thing go on during work seem to attract the people with the problems and vice versa. Working in the Silviculture side of forestry is extremely hard on the body. The hours are long, it is physically demanding and you

have to work in the elements of what the weather throws at you each day. Liro reported in their 1996 Silviculture East Coast work force study that the average fortnightly take home pay was \$400 to \$600 per fortnight. The 1995 national average fortnightly take home pay for males was \$1308. Silviculture workers on the East Coast are paid well below the national average. And although these figures were from 1996 these types of figures are still around today. These things in itself becomes very draining on both the body and the mind.

With these problems known to Wainui Silviculture before we even started, stability in our crew and a totally professional attitude to everything we undertook was our first aim. This was achieved by spending a lot of time with our employees educating them and making them realise that what they do is a profession and a very important part of forestry. After all these are the people that are more or less selecting our future forests.

Achieving these aims to start off wasn't that hard, we had a small crew of five men, we worked hard and guys were getting good money, they were learning new things and a total feel of professionalism was felt by all. As soon as we started to expand, we started having the inevitable problems. Just the basic of things such as hygiene were foreign to a couple of new employees. They were used to working all day getting all wet and sweaty then jumping in the truck and going home. Then the next morning they would turn up to work wearing the same clothes. Food and nutrition were also things we

found a lot of our employees to have no knowledge of. Breakfast would be a mince pie and a coke; lunch would be a mince pie and a smoke. Some employees were used to working entire summer days with little or no water. They would always feel lethargic in the afternoons, their production would drop and they would become grumpy and uninterested in their work. Once we started to spend some time with these men their whole attitudes changed, they became more happy with their work, and they started feeling better about themselves and their job. Unfortunately a lot of Silviculture work is looked at as being a last resort for employment and we think it is important for the contractors to drill into their employees that they are doing a professional job and that they are valued.

Also when we expanded we found that crew sizes made a huge difference in production and quality. Larger crews, eight to ten men always tended to have quality problems, you would always have personality conflicts and because of the size, absenteeism became a problem. We decided that a good six-man crew tended to be a better idea. The smaller the size the easier it is for the employees to get that feeling of importance and value, absenteeism would make everyone feel as if they were letting the team down so it has all but vanished. And because of smaller numbers in each area, quality became much easier to control.

We presently run our crews at either five to six men. We lease Toyota Hiluxs to cater for this need. These type of vehicles enable us to keep our work equipment and fire gear etc totally separate from the men to and from work. Leasing also enables our crews to have brand new vehicles. They get to and from work much quicker, in comfort, and within reason can carry our men to almost any part of the block. We also never have breakdowns meaning no down time and as long as the crew is hitting their targets, is financially feasible.

Contracting full time to just one company has also been a huge advantage to Wainui Silviculture as it has given us the chance to manage our crews and manpower in a more productive way. Knowing your work program two or more months in advance takes a huge amount of stress off the contractor enabling more time and resources to be spent on our employees in training and quality control. As long as our quality and production remains at a high level, they are willing to just keep the work rolling over. Now they even spend time working in with us to make sure programs are met and everything is done properly with less hassle. Over the years, we have given them stability, with a crew that has been able to swell and shrink its manpower according to availability of work. We are more focused on such things as fire control because we tend to believe that we are an important part of Juken Nissho and that our futures belong in their forests. Working in Silviculture on the East Coast is a challenge. And it will continue to be a challenge as long as people look at it as a second rate job, or as a last resort.