

Safety? What Safety?

Topic: Corporate Social Responsibility

Characters: Bob, President
John, Chemical Engineer
Henry, Controller
Kirk, Assistant Controller

Kirk was a bright individual who was being groomed for the Controller's position in a medium-sized manufacturing firm. After his first year as Assistant Controller, the officers of the firm were starting to include him in major company functions. For instance, today he was attending the monthly financial statement summary given at a prestigious consulting firm. During the meeting, Kirk was intrigued at how all the financial data he had been accumulating was transformed by the consultant into revealing charts and graphs.

Kirk was generally optimistic about the session and the company's future until the consultant started talking about the new manufacturing plant the company was adding to the current location and the costs per unit of the chemically plated products it produced. At that time, Bob (the President) and John (the chemical engineer) started talking about waste treatment and disposal problems. John mentioned that the current waste facilities were not adequate to handle the waste products that would be created by the "ultramodern" new plant in a manner that would meet the industry's fairly high standards, although they could still comply with federal standards. Kirk's boss, Henry, noted that the estimated cost per unit would be increased if the waste treatment facilities were upgraded according to recent industry standards. While industry standards were presently more stringent than federal regulations, environmentalists were pressuring strongly for improving regulations at the federal level. Bob mentioned that since their closest competitor did not have the waste treatment facilities that already existed at their firm, he was not in favor of any more expenditures in this area. Most managers at this meeting resoundingly agreed with Bob, and business continued on to another topic.

Kirk did not hear a word during the rest of the meeting. He kept wondering how the company could possibly have such a casual attitude toward the environment. Yet he did not know if, how, or when he could share his opinion. Soon he started reflecting on whether this was the right firm for him.

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