

## Time for a Change

Written by Joe Mikes and Derold Davis, Westin Engineering, Inc.  
Sunday, 01 April 2001 12:26

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### Knowing and practicing these fundamental steps to creating lasting change can help reinvent companies.

So it's time to change some of the structure of your maintenance department or the way it runs. Perhaps you are a new department manager or an old hand who wants to create a better environment for your employees. You know that other organizations have shown some improvements and that your facility is behind the times.

Every day there is so much to do and so little time to look at possible improvements. Each time you try to carve out an hour to develop a plan, something else breaks down or blows up. You're not alone! Unless you are employed at a perfect company with a perfect crew and an endless budget, you are facing the same things that every other maintenance manager faced when he started. How did he or she find the time to make so many good things happen?

It is not about crew skills, the temperature of the boiler, or the number of replacement parts necessary to complete a job. It is about understanding and managing change in whatever condition exists today. It is about the change *process*. Once these concepts are understood, the steps to accomplish them can be integrated into the process of your organization. Depending on the situation and assistance, the timeline will stretch or contract. It may take a little longer with fewer resources, but what is there to lose?

It is important to change the process, not the people. Process means the way business is conducted. Recently a large U.S. wastewater facility was reprimanded by the courts for not staying in compliance with regulations concerning the discharge of processed water. One cause was the slowness of the purchasing department in providing parts for asset repair and replacement. The court required the facility's management to explain how many steps were involved in purchasing a part.

After extensive research, it was determined that there were more than 300 steps to purchasing. The managers were told to go back to their offices and streamline this process and report the results. After extensive crunching and political tugging, they cleaned up the process and came back to court to display the improved method. The new method had 260 steps. That still sounds like a lot of steps, but it was a 14 percent improvement. Who would not take 14 percent more pay, labor, or spare parts?

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Sometimes it is hard to decide what process to change. The easiest way to decide is to go to the people who live with the process all the time. Employees' frustrations are opportunities for change. If you hear:

"I can never get the right parts," look at the processes of the storerooms.

"My parts always have defects," look at the receiving process and quality procedures associated with receiving.

"We never have the right parts to use," review your process with the associated vendor.

Think about the things the employees do that add real value to the process. It could be welding, wiring, filter exchanges, or anything else. Now consider the things that they have to do that do not add value. Those items are all candidates for streamlining or improving—turning the frustrations into opportunities. One small change at a time can add up to the 14 percent that was achieved in the earlier example.

Will Rogers said, "There is nothing worse than doing something well that shouldn't be done at all." If you know your employees are frustrated just trying to get simple things done, take steps to reduce the frustration. When you accomplish the changes, you will learn the key to any maintenance department improvement. When the improved processes begin to take hold, the sense of accomplishment is strong. Creating the change for the long run is the trick.

Short-term change can be accomplished quickly and without involvement from outside influence. Most managers are really looking for the long-haul change. Every company has had a program ride in like a wave and wash the top managers off their feet. It may look and feel just fine in the beginning. The problem with most of these programs is that they do not effectively change the process of doing business. When there is substantial change to a department, there will have to be a permanent change.

For example, if the tool lockers are no longer in the basement, the employees will no longer go there for tools. If the work order wrapup must be completed before employees go home, the wrapup will be done effectively. If the fence is now locked in the morning, it will have to be unlocked. Long-term change is created by thinking through the process of what goes on and establishing the substantial change necessary to make it

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long term.

### Driver for change

Having a strong leader or driver for change is absolutely necessary. Assigning the details of a minor change component can be handled by someone without a lot of authority. Designing the phases of change can be handled by an assistant. The driver should not be expected to design, create, or implement the changes. The maintenance manager should plan on being directly involved in those activities. Managing the big scope must be handled at the top for best results. The top manager must be the driver who does not necessarily handle day-to-day activities but manages the big roadblocks and carries the necessary enthusiasm.

The most effective changes often need the support of multiple departments. Gaining buy-in from multiple departments can be a roadblock. The top manager must drive the momentum and make cross-departmental decisions. The most successful changes will need a driver who will continue to steer process changes for the duration of the project. This is critical to success.

Without a driver possessing the authority to push for positive change, the overall impact will be diluted by at least one-third. That means only two-thirds of the items will be changed for the long term; two-thirds of the people will work in a new manner and overall success now has only two-thirds of a chance. This is the best-case scenario. Many changes never reach completion without an effective driver. If you're serious about improvements, insist on being or having that ownership from the beginning.

### Reaction to change

Understanding how people react to change is critical to managing it. There is a natural cycle that most people go through to accept change. Some people will change the first day and never look back. Some people will ride the fence and wait to see. Some people will never change and will say so to your face.

The usual breakdown is 20-60-20 percent, respectively. The trick is to put your energy into the group that is riding the fence. Applying your time here will accelerate the change that you are trying to put in place. Quite often, too much time is spent on the people who resist change regardless of the value. Some people in the resistance group will eventually join the acceptance group and a few will quit. The energy spent on the

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resistance group will not change the end result, so spend it on the people accepting the change and those riding the fence. The change will go into effect much sooner and will have more people accepting the change for the long term.

There is a transitional period of emotions that occur when changes roll into the department. Understanding this transitional period and training supervisors to watch for it is a great approach. They will be going through it, too, and as department managers, they will have to be observed and managed.

The transition can be broken into three phases: the Unfreezing period where business as usual is no longer accepted; the Fluid phase where the changes actually occur; and finally the Refreezing phase where the new process is solidified.

Teach supervisors to think about their people and where they expect to see them in the transition. Write down these assumptions and then compare results after the first change takes place. By having this information, you will be better equipped for the next process change. Once you understand what is going on in the minds of the people affected, you can easily manage the situations that will occur.

Deciding what to change and what ideas go first is a difficult decision. There are five principles to help guide you:

- Keep it simple
- Streamline a process before automation
- Consider the necessary buy-in from affected employees
- Consider what is right for the organization for the long term
- Consider what impact or savings will result from the change

**Keep it simple.** There are a lot of ideas on what to change and how to change it. The more thought that goes into it, the more complex it gets. By the time you develop the super solution, the path to get there becomes quite complicated. Develop the desired end result, then figure out the easiest path to get there. It can become more advanced after you build the basic process. Simple changes are challenging enough.

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**Streamline the process before automation.** There are many processes in maintenance that require highly technical equipment and software to function on a daily basis. They are all supported by basic processes that your organization uses.

For example, you should be able to develop all of your critical graphs and reports with a pencil and paper. Those graphs should demonstrate how you did yesterday, last week, and last year. If you cannot do that without the aid of expensive software, you are not ready for the software. You need to know what information is important, how you want it pulled together, and what kind of data must be gathered and stored to get the final results.

Practice the new process, work the bugs out, then automate. By practicing and working out the bugs, you are developing Best Practices for your organization. The manual version may take a long time, but it is essential for the best process change.

**Consider the necessary buy-in from employees.** This does not mean if it looks difficult, do not do it. It means that you really need to put some thought into who will be affected by the new process, who will be in the resistance category for this particular change, and who will be on the fence. Is the effect from the change worth the effort required to make the change? If it is, move forward despite the difficulty.

It is a good idea to outline the changes, group the tasks under each major change, and review this with the driver at the beginning. Recognize the process changes that will meet significant hardships and prepare the change driver for his or her support.

**Keep the organization's best interests in mind at all times.** This is the most powerful reality in change management. When I begin a recommendation for change, I always want to have the overall organization in mind. If I start with the overall organization in mind and continue with the same theory, it becomes the most powerful ally to assist the process change. It is also critical to measure your improvements.

**Consider the impact or savings.** How important is this? Why would you go through the changes if they are not going to improve some aspect of the organization? The change should have at least one positive effect. It could be direct dollars to the department,

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equivalent employees becoming available, or vision into the future to better manage the budget. Defining the value of the change will often gain enormous support from those in charge.

Too many times, the changes are rolling along when you get the call that someone wants an update and you realize you really did not document your starting point. Whatever you are changing—shutdown periods at a refinery, tank painting, pipeline replacement, equipment cleaning, warranty management of a fleet of vehicles—you should develop a baseline of information. Think about what is important to measure. Rough estimates can be better than nothing. When these metrics are developed, call in some support to make sure they are good choices. Often accounting, executive management, and department leaders can provide assistance.

Also consider if the business is seasonal or cyclical. Make sure that the period when you create the new processes is a fair comparison to the base period. Measuring your improvements is critical to every great implementation. Often setting a goal for some percentage of improvement is the catalyst to get the driver to buy in from the beginning.

In today's economy it is important to identify and remove ineffective processes. Deciding on and driving the changes for improvements is manageable if you have all the necessary tools. Begin with something simple and test your ability to try out these ideas.

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