Bob Williamson, Contributing Editor ***Ever wonder why some places have really great maintenance and reliability results and others don't? Why some maintenance crews perform like champions, preventing problems, and others keep fixing things that break? There are many reasons (and excuses).***

For the most part, maintenance and reliability results come from the behaviors and expectations of managers, supervisors and leadership in general, more than from the guys and gals on the plant floor working with their tools of the trade. Sure, if the Maintenance technicians do not have the skills and knowledge to do things right the first time, they're the ones to blame for shoddy work. Or are they?

Who put them there in the first place? Who allows them to do work they are obviously not fully qualified to do? Who decides to cut back on training and skills development because it is too expensive? It's not the Maintenance technicians! Managers, supervisors and leadership sometimes create an environment where bad things seem to happen regularly. Leadership actions often communicate their vision of the future! There was a letter to the editor in our local paper here in North Carolina a few days ago that went something like this:

The New Heat Pump…
In April last year, our 15-year-old heat pump gave up. We searched for a new one and bought the best from a local installer. It worked fine through the late spring and summer months. But, when winter came it would not keep the house warm!

So, we called for service from the company where we purchased the new heat pump. They sent out a technician who checked the auxiliary heat and emergency heat circuits and said

everything was fine. It was not! The next cold night we noticed that the coils were frosted up outside! We called them again. They sent out the technician who stated that we had too much R410 refrigerant, so he removed some. After that, it would take all day for the house to warm up! The technician came back, removed the thermostat, checked it out, changed something in the program, and pronounced it "fixed." The house still would not heat up!

So, I got out the schematics, started tracing the wiring, checked the thermostat and found that a small wire was missing between the 'auxiliary heat' and the 'emergency heat' terminals. Disgusted with the installer's technical service, I called another dealer who sent another technician out. He put in the short wire and added more R410 refrigerant to the unit and it has been fine since! I highly recommend 'Company X Heating and Air Service' for YOUR heating and air condition work.

What kind of credibility did the manager of the heat pump installer have? Did the technician believe he or she was doing the very best to solve the problem? While the "talk" may have been credible and the technician seemed to know what the problem was, the results were just the opposite! Sound familiar? Have you experienced similar levels of "service" in your own organization? Sometimes we get frustrated by little problems and sometimes they are GIANT ones!

The "Giants" we face in today's workplace can create enormous levels of fear among our Maintenance crews. Our "Giants" can be the plant manager who dictates "fix it fast or your job is on the line!" That really translates into "we don't have time to fix it right so just get it running again." Or, the pressure Maintenance technicians are under to hurry and patch things up may be so they can go home and leave the problem to the next crew. Leaving these "Giants" unchallenged, the entire plant or facility work culture becomes demoralized, frustrated, and berated because of shoddy maintenance…in other words, the big, ugly, threatening "Giant" wins!

A powerful new movie called "Facing the Giants" (2007, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment) is now out on DVD-and well worth seeing. It is about a struggling, downtrodden Georgia high school football team that keeps sinking into a pit of loss after loss, year after year, then achieves seemingly miraculous success. (Actually, this is a "must see" movie!).

There is one scene in the movie where the team believes it can't possibly win the next game, let alone the championship. An outspoken player named Brock-*someone who others on the team*

look up to -keeps grumbling that the team doesn't have a chance. Coach Grant Taylor singles out Brock and challenges him to do the "death crawl" down the football field with another player on his back. He also calls for Brock to do his very best, not for the usual 20 yards or painful 50 yards, but just to do the very best he is capable of doing- *blindf olded*
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As the entire team watches this challenge unfold, Brock struggles, but keeps pushing ahead, not knowing where he is. All the while, Coach Taylor does his best to "coach" Brock to keep going, to keep giving his very best. Sure, Brock struggles against seemingly impossible odds. But, as he progresses ever so slowly down the field, doing the "death crawl" blindfolded, with a 160-pound person on his back, the entire team watches in awe. Brock, as burdened as he is, manages to crawl the ENTIRE length of the football field. He shows what his "very best" could be!

Once the team sees that the seemingly "impossible" really is possible, it is reinvigorated and motivated to win! Then, through their renewed belief, faith, hard practice and skill-building, they actually DO win--and win big!

What did Brock really do? He showed that he could do much better than he typically demonstrated- *much more than he believed was humanly possible*. He had the skills, the knowledge and the ability to perform at much higher levels.

What did Coach Taylor do? He shared his vision with the assistant coaches and the team and relied on his belief, faith, leadership and coaching abilities, to bring out the very best in one of his team's key players.

Consider, though, what Brock and Coach Taylor together accomplished for the team.

Managers, supervisors and leadership sometimes can create an environment where bad things seem to happen regularly. Leadership actions often communicate their vision of the future!

Effective leaders in our field act as teachers, as coaches and as mentors who develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes of their Maintenance technicians, their crews and their organization.

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