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When I say "reliable," what do I really mean? A dictionary will define the word as "capable of being dependable." Synonyms include terms like "trustworthy" and "responsible." With this in mind, I ask the following question: "Are you reliable?" Or, better yet, "Are you reliable enough?" Your answer will tell how much you care about the concept of complete reliability.

My definition of reliability is "the constant and consistent ability to meet your commitments to your stakeholders"—*all of them.* That means your customers, your employees and your shareholders. Does your organization do this? "Constant" means all of the time, every hour, every day, every week and every year. "Consistent" means every person in your organization. Again, does your organization do this? If you've answered "yes," your organization is one of the very few that does these things, and I offer my congratulations! If you've answered "no" to these questions, we have a lot to discuss.

There are very few organizations that meet the above-referenced level of reliability. That's because reliability typically is an initiative that an organization sets out to achieve. Reliability, though, can't be an initiative in that initiatives have a start and usually an end, and because they are normally followed by another initiative.

Reliability must become a culture. Quite simply, it's not what you do, but how you do everything. It's how you make product, sell product, take orders, pay invoices, etc. Each thing/every thing your organization does is done reliably. It reflects a constant and consistent ability to meet your commitments to your shareholders.

The culture of reliability extends to everyone in the organization—*and I do mean everyone!* Each person in your organization must choose, every time, to do something and not hope that someone else will do it.

When people in an organization aren't personally committed to reliability, they become weak links in your chain. Such individuals might notice unplanned events starting to happen and say others need to deal with them. That means someone else will need to see a problem situation and take action. Unfortunately, we don't know when the beginning of an unplanned event would be noticed again (or if it would be noticed in time to prevent a catastrophe). A small, unplanned event that might have been mitigated could turn into a crisis, just because someone who recognizes the importance of minimizing unplanned events wouldn't take the personal responsibility to act.

Now you know the reason why many organizations fail to achieve complete reliability. The way you get someone to act is to give him/her a reason to care. We act on and talk about the things we care about.

So let me ask several more things of you: "Why do you care about reliability? "Why do care about minimizing unplanned events?" "Do you care enough to change your culture?" The answers to these questions can help you determine if, in fact, you are reliable enough. **MT**

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Jeff Dudley will expand on this topic in an upcoming feature article. Among the items he'll discuss is the importance of leadership in the quest for complete reliability.)

The opinions expressed in this Viewpoint section are those of the author, and don't necessarily reflect those of the staff and management of *Maintenance Technology* magazine.