

They All Want to be Gurus

Written by Robert C. Baldwin, CMRP, Editor
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Robert C. Baldwin, CMRP, Editor Recently, I had the opportunity to participate in two conferences: Practicing Oil Analysis '99 produced by Noria Corp. and Infrared Information Exchange '99 produced by the Academy of Infrared Thermography. In conversation with a maintenance manager from a large company several weeks prior to the first event, I mentioned that I was going to be addressing these two groups. His response: "They all want to be gurus."

I related his comment to the predictive maintenance technicians in each audience, asking: How does that make you feel? What is a guru, anyway? Do you really want to be one? Is that good or bad? For the second question, I had a ready dictionary answer:

gu·ru *Hinduism*. A personal spiritual teacher. 1. A teacher and guide in spiritual and philosophical matters. 2. A trusted counselor and adviser; a mentor.

Some of my remarks, I hope, contained an idea or two that would help members of the audience to answer the other questions for themselves.

I wish I would have had the foresight to discuss the issue further with the maintenance manager who made the guru comment. What did he mean by guru? And did he think a guru was good or bad? From his tone, I assumed he equated guru to an expert with an attitude.

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There are a number of functions or roles in an effective condition monitoring or predictive maintenance program. Guru is just one. Others that come to mind are champion, user, analyst, and field technician.

The field technician makes the inspections and collects the data and samples to be studied by the analyst, who makes recommendations to the user, who will cause the maintenance organization to take appropriate action on the information. The champion is the person who may have introduced the concept and currently supports it with enough strength to keep it going. The participants' knowledge is derived from the teacher, expert, or guru.

These functions may be fulfilled by a team or a single person, by in-house personnel or an outside service organization, but they must be fulfilled and be part of a rational process if condition monitoring is to be successful. Some valuable guidance on how to make the process work is covered by Jack Nicholas and his associates in the article on "Strengthening Your Predictive Condition Monitoring Program" (page 12).

In my mind, to become a guru is a worthy goal. The true guru is wise enough to know that all the functions must be fulfilled, even if they have to be done by the guru himself.

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