For the most part, we can describe in fairly exacting detail the functional components of a strong reliability program. Moreover, we are confident that implementing these reliability practices will yield results that benefit virtually every aspect of our business (cost, quality, service, safety and environmental performance, and capital turnover) and provide distinct competitive advantage. However, we seldom see these reliability practices and results in an operating plant. This is what I call the Reliability Paradox.

This is worse than the usual “knowing-doing” gap because of the certain knowledge that implementation will bring a definite step improvement in business results. It is almost as if reliability professionals are trying to give away $100 bills, but for unknown reasons there are few takers.

It is a real paradox, and one that we must resolve.

We know what to do, we recognize the benefits, but we just do not practice what we know. The question is why? Why is there such a large gap between knowing and doing when it comes to reliability? Here are 10 reasons in increasing order of importance:

10. “Sins of the past” take time to correct. In some plants the impact of poor reliability practices has accumulated over a lengthy period—and will not be reversed in short order.

9. Reliability is truly an integrated discipline among engineering, production, purchasing, and maintenance (in addition to information technology, human resources, and finance) but is seldom practiced this way. Reliability is unfortunately often synonymous with maintenance only.

8. Reliability does not come equipped with a widely accepted set of simple metrics and structure that are broadly understood throughout the organization.

7. Reliability structure and jargon have not been standardized and are often confusing to the

layman, most notably managers and senior executives whose support is critical to success.

6. Many managers and supervisors are unable to recognize good (or bad) reliability practices when they see them.

5. Even when they can distinguish good from bad practices, many supervisors and managers have too high a tolerance of poor performers and poor reliability practices.

4. Most organizations have a distorted view of reality and are not nearly as good as they think they are.

3. Reliability initiatives are seldom justified in business terms and, thus, fare poorly against competing initiatives.

2. We often have the wrong focus for reliability improvement (doing things right instead of doing the right things). We would improve reliability results significantly if we spent more time removing the need for maintenance vs simply rendering maintenance work more efficient.

1. Our understanding and skill at engaging organizational change is woefully lacking.

This last reason provides the greatest opportunity. Most of us developed our careers believing that if we made our arguments clearly and logically and we had the best interest of the organization at heart, our ideas would be accepted willingly. This is simply a myth.

Resistance to good ideas, including the introduction of sound reliability practices, can take many forms— from requests for endless detail to outright silence, and from sophisticated intellectual arguments to misleading compliance, etc. The underlying causes for resistance are lengthy and center on two main areas: Loss of control and feelings of vulnerability. We have to understand these dynamics to facilitate change.

Of course, dealing with feelings and emotions and trying to understand the nature of resistance to change are not generally the currency of reliability professionals and they are not addressed too well in the content of most reliability programs. Yet, these are skills that can be learned.

It is clear that the leadership role in addressing the reasons for our reliability paradox must come from the reliability professionals, for no one else is up to the job. No other group has the broad understanding of all of the issues.

The task of educating, collaborating, simplifying the metrics, identifying the need in business terms, etc., is the responsibility of reliability professionals. If we do not do this, we will always be on the periphery of the real game while others take center stage and the business falls well short of achievable results.

Reliability is core to manufacturing-based businesses, and reliability professionals must take the lead in having this widely recognized. No one else can or will. **MT**

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