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There are basically two ways to think of maintenance. First, every defect and every problem is an opportunity for improvement. Or the alternative, maintenance is an unavoidable and unpleasant necessity--something like raking leaves. The former must be our future. The latter represents backward thinking that unfortunately is too often the mindset of those controlling investment.

In mid-January I was very fortunate to participate in a discussion with a most impressive and truly visionary individual who also happens to be a corporate vice president. This was one of the most enlightening and educational discussions I have experienced in a long while. Here was an individual who had not only a strong positive vision of equipment reliability but also the power to implement the vision.

I was pleasantly surprised to learn how his company utilizes maintenance cost as a percentage of replacement asset value (a measure I have not favored) to establish worthwhile objectives and drive ownership of the improvement processes. One point is especially noteworthy: The recognition that maintenance costs are directly proportional to defects--reduce defects and reduce maintenance costs. There is no other way. Objectives like this are accompanied by a clear understanding of the necessity for investment and performance measures to track and manage results.

Several essential elements were mentioned as vital for successfully accomplishing ambitious objectives:

- Top down drive
- Creating and spreading ownership through line management
- Recognition that eliminating problems (the need for maintenance) is the only way to reduce cost
- Form a Reliability Technology group totally directed to eliminating defects
- Use predictive technologies in a proactive rather than reactive mode, require value added measures of performance
- Commitment to investment for productivity improvements and permanent corrective action.

The alert reader has probably noted a common thread--cost reductions are not a command but rather a result. Many have stated that fact in different ways but few seem to comply. In this discussion, a clear, fundamental understanding was expressed that systematically identifying and eliminating defects not only reduces costs, it is simply good business. If the top person in an organization does not totally believe that and demonstrate that belief with commitment and support, success is very difficult to achieve.

Commitment can be demonstrated by the willingness to invest to eliminate problems. Can workers be committed to corporate objectives when they must combat the same problems over and over and they are surrounded by signs of deterioration that suggest that management seems unwilling to make the financial and moral commitment necessary to make progress? There may be some "I only work here" cynics who have been that way since childhood. There are a lot more who are made that way by management. The "I only work here" attitude really says if management doesn't care, why should I?

Once we accept the premise that eliminating defects and the need for maintenance is the real goal, several other elements must be placed in effect.

The vice president's company requires reliability training for every engineer, operator, and maintenance person training that demonstrates the impact of defects, focuses attention on their elimination, and conveys value to both the company and the employees.

The search for defects is always detail oriented. Steam and air leaks, faulty insulation, recirculation valves partially open or leaking, and excessive pipe strain that reduces pump life are examples. Measures of performance track the number and cost of defects and thereby demonstrate progress to the shared objective.

Every p redictive and proactive technology has individual measures of performance based on value of results. A 4 to 1 ratio of benefit to cost is considered necessary to continue. In several cases, shifting orientation of a low-performing technology to a more proactive status substantially increased the benefit/cost ratio.

So there you have it--the overview of at least one company's idea of how maintenance and reliability are opportunities for improvement and good business as well. How would you rather be viewed--as a high value contributor to business success or a leaf raker? **MT**

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