

Wanted: Champions

Written by Richard L. Dunn, Executive Director, Foundation for Industrial Maintenance Excellence
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The word champion has two basic meanings:

1. One who wins first place in a competition of some kind; and
2. One who fights for, defends or supports a cause or another person.

The maintenance function in general, and your plant in particular, need both. If you are not now a maintenance champion, maybe you should consider becoming one—of either type.

The last several decades have proved the importance of the second kind of champion. In almost every program of change, every model for improvement needs one or more champions to be successful. The champion may be the CEO, president or other officer, plant or departmental manager, team leader, team member or just an individual who takes responsibility for supporting or leading an initiative.

To move ahead, maintenance needs such people. I dare say that no plant has moved from reactive to preventive maintenance or from preventive to predictive without one or more champions. Root cause analysis and reliability centered maintenance don't get established without champions. But championing needn't necessarily be connected only with these kinds of major overhauls of maintenance programs.

Champions can contribute and make a difference at every level.

I know of one maintenance worker, for example, who took it upon himself to champion the reduction of free-issue maintenance materials. Among the items he noticed being used to excess were work gloves. As time allowed, he would retrieve usable gloves—many in near-new condition—from trash barrels. During weekly maintenance meetings, he would point out the waste he had uncovered and encourage his coworkers to be more aware of ways to prevent it. His efforts resulted in thousands of dollars of savings in maintenance costs. Champions can emerge from anywhere. For example, I've known maintenance supervisors and managers who discover an idea at a trade show or conference and return to their plants to champion the institution of that idea in their plants.

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We've all experienced the frustration of making a suggestion only to see it ignored or rejected at some higher level, when all the suggestion needed was a champion to support the cause and follow through. For the most part, there is no shortage of ideas, only a shortage of champions for those ideas.

Maybe you, too, should consider starting down the path to become a maintenance champion of the first kind—the winner of a competition. If you look around, you can find several recognition programs that are worthy of your efforts. Probably the most rigorous and prestigious of these programs is the North American Maintenance Excellence Award (www.nameaward.com). The winners of this award will tell you that it's nice to have your maintenance operations declared a champion program. But, they also will tell you—as most champions would—that the real reward is what you accomplish along the way to the championship.

Yes, maintenance needs champions. You or your department should be among of them. **MT**

Richard L Dunn is currently executive director of the Foundation for Industrial Maintenance Excellence, the organization that administers the North American Maintenance Excellence (NAME) Award. He has been an observer, critic and supporter of industrial maintenance for more than 35 years.

The NAME competition Dunn refers to here is the topic of an entire track at MARTS 2006. Feel like being a "maintenance champion?" Plan to join Rick and others at MARTS to learn how your organization can vie for the NAME Award.