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Many of the pyramidal corporate management structures favored up to the 1990s have virtually all been closeted in favor of the lean, flat organizational tree, in which executive and operational management staff often take on symbiotic roles.

Within these downsized, ‘flatter’ management organizations, however, there remain hierarchical levels of accountability and responsibility. For example, in today’s typical organization the maintainer might report to either a maintenance or production supervisor, who, in turn, may report to a dual-role maintenance/production manager, who may report to the plant manager, who could report to the board of directors, who, in turn, reports to its corporate shareholders. Add profit sharing to the mix and the circle is complete when the maintainer is also a shareholder. In this new order, each and every corporate employee is charged with a degree of responsibility and accountability, to be defined within their new job description.

Within the maintenance function, management’s responsibility is two-fold: first, to understand and communicate the business needs of the corporation to the maintenance fraternity; and second, to provide the maintenance department with a set of structured management systems, processes and integrated business/department goals that allow maintenance to perform and achieve in a productive, proactive manner. When a maintenance department is able to work with a management team that delivers on its responsibilities and understands the integral nature of the maintenance function, it is more likely to accept change, and tangibly measure, quantify (probably for the first time ever) and improve upon its corporate goals. How is this achieved?

Understanding prompts communication

A manager’s business perspective is very different to that of a maintainer. Whereas a maintainer will usually only plan (if at all) for daily/weekly activities, and is more likely to be involved in work at a detailed or ‘micro’ level, an executive manager’s perspective is more likely to take on a macro approach, requiring planning in the three- to five-year range, viewing business from a 60,000 ft. perspective. An operations or middle manager’s responsibility is to bridge the gap between the micro and macro, providing logistical planning in the monthly to

yearly time frame. Understanding each other's differing needs and requirements is key to harmonization and communication within the corporation. This is achieved through a number of initiatives:

Aligned Vision…
The maintenance department partners with management to chart out a departmental vision that clearly defines and states to all other departments its commitment to them and the corporation as a whole. The maintenance vision is easily crafted using the corporate vision statements as templates, ensuring cohesion and alignment with other departments and the corporation.

Corporate-wide Programs…
The maintenance department aligns its business methods and processes to comply with such corporate-wide initiatives as quality assurance ISO 9000/QS 9000 or environmental ISO 14,000. Intradepartmental collaboration on such initiatives assures positive change and agreement on the way maintenance is managed and performed.

Business Planning…
Building a maintenance business plan forces maintenance to be proactive, to attain insight on corporate needs, to achieve input toward the production schedule, to receive new initiative funding and to develop and aspire to milestone achievements. Again, business planning is a collaborative maintenance department/management team exercise.

Goals and Objectives…
These elements must be achievable and reflect short-term, mid-term and long-term needs and requirements of both the department and the corporation. Determining goals and objectives allows the maintenance department and management to work together as a team and understand each other's unique business perspective. Goals and objectives represent tangible, quantifiable deliverables that signify program success and achievement.

Reports…
Communicating effectively and facilitating management's needs and requirements will likely afford the maintenance department newfound respect and a voice in future planning initiatives. Maintenance must seek to determine and deliver representative reports required by management.

In an age of corporate mergers, downsizing and budget slashing, the maintenance department is always vulnerable to cutbacks in both budget and manpower. Many maintenance departments have witnessed the destruction of their proactive maintenance programs because management did not understand the importance of the maintenance function and the maintenance investment required to attain and sustain throughput capacity and quality assurance.

Maintenance must be proactive in its dealings with management, understand management's perspective and teach management the importance of the maintenance function. **MT**

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