

Leaders and Practitioners: There Really is a Difference

Written by Robert M. Williamson, Strategic Work Systems, Inc.
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Robert M. Williamson, Strategic Work Systems, Inc. Here is an example. Plant No. 1 has worked for more than two years to implement Total Productive Maintenance (TPM). They have yet to see any real measurable, sustainable results from their efforts.

Plant No. 2 started using TPM last fall to address a production bottleneck. They purposely stayed away from implementing TPM on a broad scale. Their results were impressive and sustained.

Plant No. 1's TPM efforts were led from the maintenance and reliability department as a way to reduce the need for equipment maintenance by expanding operator involvement. The reliability manager fashioned a training program for operators and developed a training center staffed with instructors.

Plant No. 2's TPM efforts were led by the plant general manager, who recognized the importance of proper maintenance, as a way to improve production throughput and reduce operating costs. He was an active leader—he walked the talk. He explained how TPM activities were to be used to achieve production goals to make the plant more competitive and responsive to customers' needs. He actively participated in all TPM activities from the leadership committee to hands-on training.

Plant No. 1 focused on eliminating well-documented equipment problems, but not necessarily on the production bottleneck.

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Plant No. 1 saw virtually no results from its efforts. Because the starting point was too large, the operators had little or no discretionary time to do any of the equipment maintenance procedures they learned. Production supervisors also kept them focused on making product to meet production quotas. Equipment continued to be unreliable which caused more downtime and demanded more production overtime just to meet quotas.

Plant No. 2 focused on improving competitiveness, and ensuring the future by targeting the production bottleneck.

Plant No. 2 saw fast and sustainable results from the TPM efforts. Last fall they were making weekly production quotas using five machining cells running three shifts with 14 percent overtime. After their first applied TPM training event and the completed action items, they were achieving the same weekly production quotas using four machining cells running two shifts with 3 percent overtime, and the cost to produce a product was significantly lower. They are now focusing TPM on the next machining cell that is a known bottleneck. Their goal is to make weekly production quotas using three machining cells on two shifts with 3 percent overtime, achieving still lower production costs and improved throughput.

Plant No. 2 focused on a problem area first and created a "pocket of excellence" in the plant. With that, they defined what they wanted for the future of the plant, and for the people who work there. They provided examples of their workplace and work culture of the future that they could see, touch, measure, and discuss with very little abstract speculative examples.

What are the differences between the two plants? One is obvious—the purposes of their TPM initiatives: focusing on maintenance problems vs. business goals. The other difference goes back to the difference between practitioners and leaders. While a practitioner may be practicing a profession, the leader is leading change. The practitioner focused on maintenance and reliability improvement while the leader focused on improving throughput and reducing production cost, not to be confused with cutting costs. The leader created an overall work environment conducive to engaging people on the plant floor in making improvements in their machines and work areas.

Are you a practitioner or a leader? Are you practicing the profession of maintenance and reliability or are you leading improvements by making the plant or facility core competitive? Are you focusing on results and also changing the work culture or facilitating the latest initiative? In today's market with a growing shortage of skilled maintenance people, practitioners will have to

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find ways to also become leaders of change in the way maintenance gets done. **MT**