

Developing a sustainable advantage

Written by Robert C. Baldwin, CMRP, Editor
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Robert C. Baldwin, CMRP, Editor A couple of months back I suggested that e-maintenance (efficiency + effectiveness + enterprise = excellence) might be what we need to make maintenance the next hot business function. Then last month, I suggested that reliability is indeed a core competency, and those who invest in it will survive, and those who do not will be deselected. But there is more to success than knowing what you need to do and how to do it. That added dimension is attitude.

The attitude for success is made up of many elements: confidence, curiosity, ability, passion, bias for action, energy, optimism, and more. These characteristics comprise what is referred to by some as the e-culture, because they are attributes exhibited by many leaders and workers in dot-com and new technology companies.

This total proactive attitude, embodied in the e-culture, whether applied to reliability and maintenance of plant equipment or the development of new technologies, depends on competency of the work force. It is almost impossible for people to be confident, optimistic, and productive if they don't have the skills and knowledge that go with the territory.

Unfortunately, maintenance leadership has not always been committed to ensuring that people in the organization develop needed skills and knowledge. In plant after plant, there are supervisors more interested in telling people what to do rather than working with them to ensure that they understand the job and have the skills they need to do it.

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In the past, training achievement has been measured by the amount of training materials on the supervisor's office shelf. The training job was considered complete if workers were able to catch the training CDs flipped to them like Frisbees by a disinterested supervisor. Those days are over. There is no return on training without an investment of time by supervisors.

Training takes commitment on the part of plant leaders. They must lead by example, constantly upgrading their own level of knowledge, as well as by supporting the work force by providing an environment for learning and taking an active interest in the skills improvement of every worker. There are two articles in this issue that may help. "Doing the Right Training Right" (page 20) deals with training needs assessment. "Internet Workshops" (page 36) shows how a company is leveraging technology to spread knowledge through its work force.

As one technology industry leader said recently, "At the end of the day our employees may be the only sustainable competitive advantage we have." **MT**

