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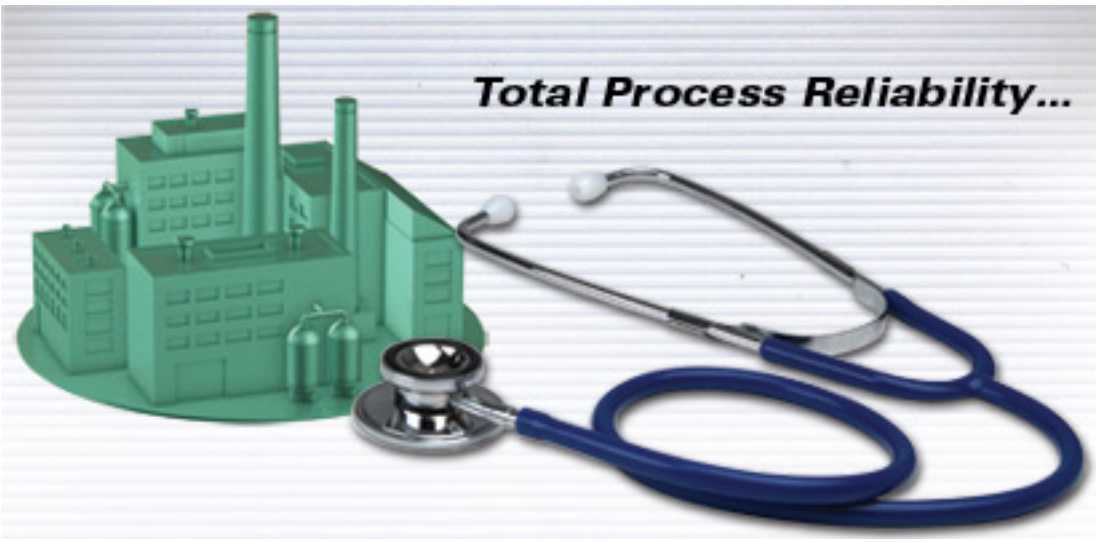


This life-enhancing biotherapeutics company has found the prescription for much healthier equipment systems. Could this same treatment work for your operations?

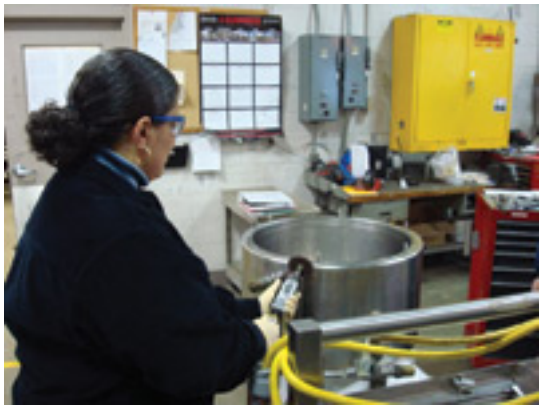
How do you transform an equipment failure rate of 21 days on average to 415 days and counting? One North Carolina company has found the answer.

The vision of Talecris Biotherapeutics (Talecris), a global biotherapeutic and biotechnology company based in Research Triangle Park, NC, is "to be the recognized global leader in developing and providing vital protein therapeutics." Achieving this vision requires Talecris to make a firm commitment to its employees—*as well as to its equipment.*

Success in the biotherapeutics industry involves more than smart science. It takes talented personnel, leadership and dedication to ensure that equipment and technology are efficiently and effectively utilized to produce life-sustaining treatments. So, in early 2007, Talecris launched a Total Process Reliability (TPR) initiative—*opting to characterize it, in an internal play on words, as "ToPR."* The purpose was to help bolster uptime, reduce maintenance costs and create a sense of equipment ownership among employees.

Total Process Reliability is a discipline based on accountability and shared asset management (see Sidebar). Using team charters, equipment guides, job aids and work plans, ToPR helps to make complicated tasks manageable. The more streamlined and in-sync a company's equipment operators, mechanics and managers are, the more reliable the equipment will be.

The Talecris "ToPR" initiative—*pronounced "Topper" by employees*—is a comprehensive training program with an emphasis on equipment stewardship and a systematic approach to increasing employee engagement. The company sees ToPR as an ideal solution to equipment problems that have the potential to plague productivity.


Purification Technician Julie Monteiro polishes the edges during the Westfalia EIT.

Changing and challenging

Ensuring the operational integrity of its Westfalia centrifuges was the main goal behind Talecris' implementation of ToPR. This equipment separates proteins into fractions; some of the proteins are discarded while others are purified for the production of the company's life-enhancing therapies. It's a process that is central to the Talecris operations in Clayton, NC. In other words, the performance of the Westfalias and the expertise of those who manage and operate them are essential to fulfilling the company's vision.

Richie Hogg is a Talecris veteran with nearly 17 years of production experience in fractionation, operations, training and performance development. When the company decided to implement ToPR as an equipment improvement initiative, it turned to Hogg. Who better to facilitate a site improvement program than an individual who understands so many facets of the production process?

Hogg sees his position today as more theoretical than hands-on. "As ToPR coordinator, my main responsibility is to promote transformation through collaboration and partnership within the maintenance, operations and engineering departments. I am a change agent."

Talecris is learning that ToPR—*and success of the Westfalias*—begins with departments planning and executing in unison. "We are finding ways to work together to make our processes better, and to make our equipment more reliable," Hogg says.

Technician Joe Standley works on a Westfalia centrifuge during an EIT.

Trying to implement change while forging partnerships between departments with disparate duties can lead to difficulty in a manufacturing environment. Without it, however, the equipment will suffer. For ToPR to fully succeed requires drastic change and, ultimately, a challenge to the culture. As an example, equipment reliability can no longer be solely the burden of service personnel. ToPR stresses that maintenance of mission-critical equipment is the responsibility of all who have a role in its function.

According to Eddie Hairr, senior production specialist and ToPR team leader, some employees were a bit hesitant when ToPR was first introduced. Not anymore. "In the beginning," he remembers, "technicians were apprehensive about participating. Now I have too many volunteers for each scheduled event. It just goes to show that people want to be part of something successful."

Building a new culture

What happened to alleviate employees' unease? Hogg found ways to make the partnerships and the changes work.

"We formed Equipment Improvement Teams (EIT) to take a formal approach to bringing employees [maintenance, operations and engineering] together. It's a diverse and collaborative team," he points out. "We take a piece of equipment out of service and restore it to like-new or better condition. Through this process, employees experience first-hand the value that ToPR offers. In learning more about the equipment, they then become ambassadors for the culture we're building."

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