

## Focus On Results; Change the Culture Along the Way

Written by Bob Williamson  
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The "breakthrough strategy" discussed in my last column\* works. Equipment becomes more reliable, costs go down, and behaviors change along the way. The key is focusing on results--the kind of results that will get people's attention on the plant floor as well as key decision-makers. Select the equipment that, if it ran better and was more reliable, would generate sizeable savings. But, more importantly, select equipment that would generate more throughput and revenue. Focus on this equipment and pull out all the stops. Apply applicable best practices on this equipment only, and help everyone understand why.

But beware. The biggest mistake I have seen companies make is to begin with a "focus on results" approach, then, somewhere just a short distance into the mission, default to the same old thing (broad-scale implementation) and lose sight of what they set out to do (improve the reliability of selected pieces of equipment).

It's fairly easy to get enamored with setting up a new program to improve broad-scale performance. It's fairly easy to get a small group of people rallied around a maintenance improvement project. The problem with this "activity-based" approach is that the enthusiasm runs out of steam before sustainable results are realized.

The key is to stay focused on results. If the goal is to improve performance, be specific about it. Focus on the desired results and measure progress every step of the way. If it doesn't improve, try something else. Engage the people who work in, on, and around the equipment in the improvement activities if you hope to change, or at least influence, the way they operate and maintain the equipment.

One of our recent clients had a lube oil problem. In a recent 3-month period the company spent over \$70,000 on lube oils for rotating equipment. This was excessive and had to be attacked. When focusing on improving the performance of four pieces of rather large critical equipment, we kept stressing the need to not just stop oil leaks but to eliminate the causes. Two reasons were discussed. One was easy--by stopping leaks we will reduce the cost of lube oils. The second reason was not as obvious but was also easy--leaking lube oil means that a component that depends on regular lubrication is probably not getting it. This type of leak will result in premature equipment failure.

After spending a day on the equipment with the operators and maintenance mechanics discussing the woes of leaking lube oil and the problems that creates, oil consumption was reduced from an average 12 to 14 gal. per day to only 4 gal. daily. The workplace and the equipment looked cleaner, and it definitely was easier to work without getting dirty and oily.

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The next step was to address contamination in the lube oil that contributes to premature failure. Each of the four large machines experienced a catastrophic failure within the previous 12 months and signs of lubrication problems were discovered. The same work group found water and sand getting into the oil from at least four sources:

- The bulk oil tank had a screw cap in the top and it was stored outside.
- The rubber oil transfer lines were draped over the handrail, also outside.
- The fittings and hoses connecting the bulk oil tank, the day tank, and the equipment were designed for compressed air, not liquids.
- The pump used to transfer oil to the equipment was stored on the floor with its ports uncovered.

We also found that oil sampling and analysis was done on an intermittent basis, and never on the new oil.

The good news is that the company has begun hard piping the oil lines, storing the bulk tank under cover, and developing a procedure for regularly sampling oil from the bulk tank as well as the equipment.

I tell this story because it is an example of focusing on results. The company could have lost focus and implemented a massive lube oil cost cutting program by stopping leaks. Results were achieved and new practices learned by involving the work group in a focus on four specific machines. There was a clear business case to improve performance and reduce costs.

The benefits of this short session were seen not only by the work group but also by the management and leadership at many levels in the organization. The next step is to build on this success and target other reliability and work culture issues on the same equipment. **MT**