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Good news! The chairman and the president of your company have just called to say they will be visiting your plant within a half hour. They requested that you present all the ideas you have to make your maintenance program world class. Do you:

a) Speed read several books on maintenance management?

b) Make a bulleted list of everything that you can remember about maintenance management?

c) Ask the person at the desk next to you for advice?

d) Create a mind map of a maintenance strategy?

If you chose d) you would quickly outline your ideas for communication in a coherent and organized manner and have 25 minutes to spare!

What is a mind map?
Mind mapping is a technique developed in the late 1960s by Tony Buzan. It is designed as a more creative and innovative approach to thinking that taps the entire brain (not just the 1 percent that most of us use every day) and allows projects to be organized in minutes. Mind maps use associations connected to each other just as the brain does. Pictures, symbols, colors, keywords, and codes are all key elements in a mind map.

To create a mind map, you would start with a drawing or graphic at the center of a piece of paper that represented your plant or the maintenance program. Next you would draw lines and note whatever associations come to mind for you on each emanating spoke. Additional ideas, related phrases, drawings, keywords, or codes would be noted on sub spokes and so on. This would continue until you had a representation of everything you know about the subject displayed in front of you.

A mind map is like a road map as it provides an overview of a large subject area. It makes thinking, planning, and problem solving a lot more fun. Until recently, the main tools for mind mapping were paper, pens of different colors, and your mind. You still need your mind; however, the Internet allows you to download free mind mapping software, take online training courses, and read how-to articles about mind mapping.

Maintenance applications for mind mapping include planning, project management, running meetings, preparing presentations and abstracts, and solving complex problems. According to SimTech-USA, Boeing Aircraft uses a 25-ft long mind map to enable a team of aeronautical engineers to learn in a few weeks what would have taken a few years.

Free trial software downloads

For those who are ready to jump right in, there are numerous software programs available for free download and/or trial use. Each title has slight differences so it may be worthwhile to find a system that best suits your style.

Try these sites for free program downloads:

- SimTech-USA offers a good deal of how-to information, Mindmapping samples, and case histories as well as free and professional versions of its Mindmapper software. It even offers a Mindmapper junior version for the kids.
- Mindjet is very focused on project management and offers a special version of its software for operation on a Palm Pilot. Another system for PDAs can be found at Step-by-Step.

- Other free download sites include Visual Mind, Ygnius (formerly Ygnite), and Concept Draw (includes a Macintosh version).

- For those who require heavy math, MindPlugs' Plug-in for Mind Manager allows live calculating of formulas.

Resources and how-to sites

Peter Russell offers great advice and explanations for using mind maps as does Charles

Cave .

Read the book

For those seeking to know more about this fascinating subject, I recommend the book that started it all: "*The Mind Map Book: How to Use Radiant Thinking to Maximize Your Brain's Untapped Potential* " (Plume; ISBN 0452273226). Of course it is available online at Amazon.com or Barnes and Noble .

As always, please let us know what you think of this column, how it helped you, and what subjects you would like us to cover in the future. **MT**

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