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In her “My Take” column in the September 2010 issue, *Maintenance Technology*’s editor Jane Alexander focused on the threat to industry due to the departure of experienced engineers and technicians. When these people go, they carry years of valuable knowledge of rotating-equipment maintenance and reliability out the door with them. No matter the causes of this widespread loss of skills and talent, the situation is leaving the maintenance and reliability community with a serious shortfall in hands-on experience. Is it possible to supplement this crucial— *and unique* —expertise in the maintenance and reliability of rotating equipment?

The most positive indication that progress is being made is the deployment of higher-technology solutions that address the need to keep rotating equipment up and running. We’re now seeing industry-wide evidence of the switch from conventional *reactive* maintenance methods of fixing rotating equipment when it fails, to employing state-of-the-art bearing protetion technology aimed at *maintaining* rotating equipment— *without failure* . Such technology has been successfully implemented in a large number of process plants around the world, where up to 90% of rotating-equipment failures have been eliminated.

Utilizing technology as a supplement for job experience should not be viewed as disruptive. Just like every other sector, the process industries are employing as much technology as possible to remain competitive on the global stage.

Our customers are doing “more with less” and placing even more emphasis on controlling costs by improving the useful life of investments. In these cases, applying reliability-focused technology reduces the day-to-day tactical maintenance headaches and allows for valuable resources to be redeployed into areas of strategic importance to the company’s long-term success. This will, of course, be a subtle shift, since the application of advanced technologies will happen over time as equipment (pumps, motors, gearboxes, etc.) is upgraded or refurbished.

The process industries are no different than any other type of business facing competitive pressures—*and trying to hire and develop talent to fill the void left by experienced predecessors*. However, the unique skill set of engineers and technicians who are entrusted with responsibility for the capacity assurance of rotating equipment (i.e., keeping those assets available and running reliably, safely, efficiently, profitably, etc.) magnifies the challenge. Organizations that respond
by shifting their focus from that of simply finding a “quick-fix” to one of implementing innovative solutions that address longer-term reliability issues and provide the greatest ROI will ultimately be the most successful.

The American workforce long prided itself on being among the most productive on the planet—*and that productivity has not been based solely on the number of hours worked per week*. U.S.-based companies have embraced the importance of investing in technology as a means of driving productivity, efficiency and quality forward. Let’s hope this trend continues.
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