Ken Bannister, Contributing Editor

Unless you have been in hibernation these past months, you likely have been riveted to unfolding events in what may be one of the most exciting election seasons in United States political history. I am, of course, referring to the race for the Democratic Party’s nomination for President. For the first time, the Democrats will offer the American public either a woman or an African-American as their candidate for the highest office in the land.

As the campaign for President progresses, the candidates for both the Democratic and Republican parties will be offering platforms based on varying degrees of change (i.e. subtle to sweeping changes) to the current administration’s way of doing business. Later, voters will exercise their choice by casting ballots for their preferred platform. That’s how many political systems work—but that’s not how business works. Although politics and business are inherently tied together, business differs greatly when it comes to changes in management.

The first indication most of us receive about a new corporate ownership or the hiring/promotion of a new manager is on the actual day new management takes over. Unlike politics, employees rarely get to influence management change through a democratic questioning and voting process. In and of itself, the changing of the guard is often a good thing in that change must occur if we are to break the status quo and progress. In politics, we can prepare ourselves for change by getting to know the candidates and their platforms prior to voting. In business, we typically aren’t afforded such luxury.

New management/new managers, eager to introduce their version of how the company or department should be managed, often move too quickly and don’t provide their staff adequate time to prepare a business case to showcase any current program excellence. Instead, many first-class programs may be defended poorly and replaced— through ignorance—with inferior approaches.

Over the past decades, I have worked with many corporations that have endured a changing of the guard, in which instantaneous sweeping change frequently has thrown the “baby out with the bath water.” Ironically, in my experience, the program that offers the most for the least expenditure— a lubrication management program—is almost always the first thing on the chopping block. Pending automation of lubrication systems is cancelled in favor of good old grease nipples. Structured lubrication PM tasks are discarded in favor of the good old “lubricate as necessary” approach. Predictive oil sampling is cancelled immediately. It’s all done in the name of costsaving. Thus, small short-term gains are achieved at the expense of large long-term losses.

New management should question their new staff, asking not about what they would get rid of, but rather, what program or part of a program they would keep—and why. If we are not questioned in such a way, we must defend excellence and worthwhile programs by producing the original Return On Investment (ROI) statement, or audit/review that will have documented the original findings creating a need for a program’s introduction. These documents must be presented to the new management along with current success stories, backed up with tangible performance indicators that will include uptime, overall equipment effectiveness (OEE), mean time between failure (MTBF), decreased lubrication-related failures, etc. A good presentation also should include suggestions for making incremental change(s) needed to improve upon the current program.

Defending excellence ensures that good program investment is not lost. This not only makes you look good, it also gives the new management team solid ground from which to manage a successful “changing of the guard.”

Are you ready to defend your lubrication or management program? Good Luck!

*Ken Bannister is lead partner and principal consultant for Engtech Industries, Inc. Telephone: (519) 469-9173; e-mail: kbannister@engtechindustries.com*