

Reactive Training: The Cancer Within

Written by Manfred R. Smith, Smith and Associates, Inc.
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It's a rare plant indeed that hasn't fallen victim to this "disease" at some time in the past. This month's training "doctor" discusses the symptoms, the cure and getting well quick!

Over the years, training consultants have seen numerous organizations trying to move the culture of their operations and maintenance departments toward that ever-elusive goal of "world class" (total quality, best of something, excellence something, etc.). This typically involves changing a reactive culture to one that embodies a proactive approach, where elements such as planning and scheduling, procedures, inventory control, preventive maintenance, root cause failure analysis, workforce development, et al prevail as key considerations. There are of course many other elements and subsets to those cited, but let's focus on workforce development and training—specifically *reactive training*.

Many of you may be scratching your heads because this term is unfamiliar to you. Rest assured, though, that you have been a victim, quite unaware, and likely are either perpetuating or participating in this type of training. As the title suggests, reactive training can be categorized as a cancer. Sounds harsh, doesn't it? But, then, think of how a cancer impacts a healthy individual—intrusive, quietly spreading, destroying vital organs, affecting the quality of life, destroying relationships and lives and placing tremendous strains on the financial wherewithal of those affected to deal with it.

Simply stated, reactive training is a general lack of training or an intervention that tries to increase the skill and/or knowledge level of an individual/department only AFTER a negative event has occurred. Notice the inclusion of words and phrases such as "lack,

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"tries" and "after a negative event." Now, having defined reactive training, let's apply the cancer metaphor. As you read this passage, keep in mind that each statement involves a significant training element.

Table I. Golf vs. Plant Training

Golf Event	Equipment/Skill?	Company Event
Your ball budget is approaching a new car payment.	A ball is a ball – it goes where you hit. A high performance ball goes a long way...out of bounds. The nod goes to SKILL	You provide training only after a negative event has occurred.
You go to the driving range the night before a company match, hoping to correct that nasty slice.	Like cramming for a test...you might get lucky on a few shots. Equipment won't make a bit of difference here.	You provide training to satisfy an hourly objective.
You take a mulligan or a "do-over"	Lack of practice or proficiency. Again, equipment won't help you hit the ball, keep it from going in the water or the woods	You train everyone for an incident that was created by an "inattention to detail" issue.
You back the golf cart over your boss' \$500 putter. This restricts you from renting a cart at your favorite course.	Inattention to detail—you'll be lucky to have a job in the morning.	A license has expired. You have a dismal safety record. See \$500 putter story.
The money you had set aside for lessons was used to buy a new Ping driver that you can't hit.	Never took the time to learn how to hit with it, nor did you invest in any lessons. The driver can't swing itself. Skill gets the nod again.	You regularly have money left over in your training budget

The plant is running smoothly and the workforce appears to be reasonably competent. Training gets the budget axe and the cancer starts (*could be anytime and you could be at any point*).

- Turnover becomes an issue and you don't have the resources for adequately training new hires. Conditions begin to deteriorate.
- Your supervisors, already strapped, are unable to provide sufficient direction and oversight for both new hires and job incumbents. The cancer is growing.
- Process upsets and equipment issues are routine – you come to realize that maybe people don't know as much as they're supposed to since they never have received any formal training. The disease is advancing and becoming widespread.
- Supervisors are frustrated with workers who appear to be making things worse rather than better, and workers are frustrated with supervisors for a lack of direction and technical support. The disease is having a debilitating effect, much like the advanced stages of an illness.

With this scenario, one can easily see how the cancer can start, propagate and grow. One also can see that recovery will not be easy and likely will be very painful.

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Let's lighten up

No matter in what part of the country we live, who among us has not heard about comedian Jeff Foxworthy's particular brand of humor? Most have probably heard some of his "You might be a redneck if. . ." jokes. Giving due credit to Mr. Foxworthy (and to paraphrase him), the same approach could be taken to the topic of reactive training. See below:

Table II. What Does Training *Really* Cost?

Parameter	Potential Cost	Cost (\$)
Poor (or lack of) communication between critical groups in your facility	Inefficient Ops; Quality Issues; Rework; Improper line set up;	
More safety infractions	Lost Time Work Cases; OSHA Recordable Cases	
Regulatory fines	Environmental; Safety; State; Federal	
Process upsets or failures	Downtime; Equipment Damage; Rework; Energy	
Accidents, injuries and fatalities	Safety; Fines; Lawsuits; Workforce Efficiency	
Poor asset life-cycle	Unnecessary Capital Expenditure; Under-realized Asset Operation Life Time	
Asset damage	Production Capability Compromised; Unnecessary Capital Expenditure	
Improper line sets and/or operation	Unrealized Production Capacity; Quality Issues	

Your training might be reactive if. . .

- the front tines on your forklift look like sleigh skids.
- you invested in all new automated equipment and cut the training budget in half to justify the cost.
- you've been fined by EPA because of a spill and waited for them to mandate employee training.
- your associates still don't know why you can't use the computer CD drive as a cup holder.
- the only formal training your people ever received is from the school of hard knocks.
- you average one OSHA recordable accident a month—and that's an improvement.
- you leave money in your training budget at the end of every fiscal year and think that's a major accomplishment.
- your favorite line is 'git er done'.

Seriously, though

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The reactive training approach is far too prevalent. We've heard the difference between reactive and proactive maintenance—it's much the same for training. In fact, this kind of training, or a general lack of training, can be far worse than reactive maintenance.

Although **reactive maintenance** is far from being a desirable approach to equipment maintenance, it can keep a plant operating, albeit not very effectively or efficiently. On the other hand, how well or how long do you think an asset, even under heroic or reactively maintained circumstances, is going to run under the direction of someone who is improperly or inadequately trained? Not very! Still, it happens far more frequently than most people think or want to admit.

There is a predisposition on the part of management and engineering departments to think/suggest that the latest computer-based whiz-bang or electronic gizmotron will be the next "be-all and end-all" to whatever ails your plant, including work performance and training problems. Do we have news for them! Such items are only part of the answer—maybe even the wrong answer—and often end up adding to the problem. Not only has your workforce not been trained well in the past, now it's having to deal with additional technical training demands that likely require an even higher degree of sophistication, knowledge and skills. How well do you think that's going to go?

Consider the following: Golf is an absolute passion for many. So, what's more important, the skill of the player or the equipment the player uses? Some will argue for the equipment. "It's all in the equipment." Others will argue that a good golfer will make lousy equipment look great. Golf actually serves as a good metaphor to discuss some of these issues. With each scenario listed in Table I on the previous page, ask yourself if a difference can be made by adjusting equipment or doing something about the competency of an individual. Notice the inclusion of a comparable business equivalent.

If you look at these scenarios objectively, it wouldn't be hard to imagine a player with a handicap approaching 30 (*not good for those unfamiliar with the game*). No amount of expensive, cutting-edge equipment technology is going to rescue this individual under any circumstances. In the game of golf, handicaps provide mediocre and poor players with a means of competing with individuals who are much more competent. Unfortunately, business can't "level" work or performance expectations in invoking a handicap to make up for a deficiency. Neither will automation or a significant capital project that replaces some antiquated equipment. So, getting back to our original premise, you be the judge.

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People want to do the right thing and do a proper job. Certainly, there's a sense of pride in achieving this and an added sense of job security if one knows that (s)he is accomplishing assigned tasks as expected, or is keeping his/her skills updated to match the requirements of the equipment that they are running or maintaining. How can one reasonably expect this to be so if the time is NOT invested in properly training your employees?

Basic human nature and psychology suggests that there's nothing more frustrating for an individual than to try to accomplish a task when you:

- are not sure how to do something, but feel you'll be considered inept if you ask;
- haven't received even so much as a briefing on what is expected to be done, but your performance is supposed to be top-notch;
- don't know if what you're doing is meaningful;
- don't have the right type of tools, skills or knowledge. Failure to provide even the most basic training can be a morale buster. As numerous studies have shown, low morale leads to poor work quality and results in a loss of productivity.

Here's the message you give the troops with proactive training: We care about you and we want to help you do your job better by providing you with training that enables you to problem solve. . . order the right parts. . . predict issues. . . increase service/product quality. . . do the job right the FIRST time. . . do the job safely! Nothing you do at your plant will send a stronger message and have a more profound impact than to recognize the need for effective, timely, appropriate training. The results are easily recognized. They include, among other things:

- employee buy-in, feedback and money-saving ideas;
- more uptime;
- fewer replacements and repairs;
- increased efficiency;
- better morale;
- increased productivity;
- fewer safety incidents or infractions.

Experts suggest that reactive maintenance costs three to five times what proactive maintenance could have prevented. What, then, does reactive training cost? The numbers

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vary greatly and are influenced by a diverse factors, including type of industry, plant age, product type, regulatory oversight and area demographics, to name a few. I suggest that the variable are comparable when comparing a proactive and reactive training approach. Of course, if you don't have a significant annual training budget, the ratio might be significantly different. There are a few areas that tend to be fairly common across a broad range of industries regardless of products. So, let's restate the question: How much does training really cost you? For clues, see Table II. Be honest when you look at Table II. There's a tendency to think that these simply are "the cost of doing business."

Granted, there definitely is a cost of doing business, but not for any one of the listed items. As mentioned previously, type of industry, public risk and the severity of the parameter have significant bearing on cost (operations and maintenance budgets, among other). Each of these parameters can easily be addressed and rectified with an appropriate and targeted training intervention. When you think about the costs associated with any of these parameters, it should become clear that an appropriate budget expenditure would be easily justifiable-and would likely be significantly less than what your reactive world is currently looking like.

Improvements in efficiency, quality, reliability and safety can certainly justify investment in a proactive training approach, something that will exorcise any reactive cancer once and for all. **MT**

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