As someone who has worked in maintenance most of my life, I'm amazed to still see the same problems that I did when I first picked up a wrench.

Reactive maintenance work is still a booming business. Equipment failures still plague many facilities. Maintenance people are still dealing with the same problems that dogged their fathers and grandfathers. Isn't that strange?

While technology marches on, it can't transform a reactive maintenance program into a proactive program. Better tools applied reactively only allow us to react faster. These tools can help us tremendously, but many organizations waste their capabilities on detecting failures they have neither the skills nor willpower to eliminate. It's like driving screws with a hammer.

I attend a number of maintenance conferences each year—*and see the same faces time and again*. They're the faces of champions that refuse to give up. They have truckloads of technical knowledge and common sense stored in their heads, yet back at their plants they can't find customers for what they have to offer. They know what to do. They just can't figure out how to do it. There's a big difference between having great ideas and creating a compelling vision that excites others. Selling is a critical maintenance skill, and one that needs to be learned. In my opinion, however, most maintenance leaders haven't mastered it. They simply can't sell. Brutal? Yes, but we can't fix this problem if we aren't honest with each other.

Many people who depend on maintenance personnel to keep their machines running don't know that failure is an option, not a fact. They think that maintenance crews are supposed to fix broken things. This belief falls far short of our ability to avoid most failures and reduce the consequences of the rest to a level that causes very little stress. Our customers really don't know what they need (and would be shocked and appalled if they knew what they were missing).

Every day, people who know it is wrong to do so are conducting maintenance work incorrectly. The knowledge needed to do the same work correctly is free for the taking—*and has been for about 50 years* .
Leaders keep asking their maintenance teams to prove that proactive maintenance is better, all the while throwing away profits on reactive work that costs easily four times as much. Every time proactive maintenance is applied, it saves money, improves productivity, increases quality and enhances worker safety. To ask for proof of this is like asking someone to prove that the Earth is round.

Try producing a consistent, high-quality product without written procedures, without a schedule and without raw materials. Impossible? Reactive maintenance is the same thing. The fact that reactive production plants run at all is a testament to the people who do maintenance work under these ridiculous conditions.

Let's do something about this—*today!* Commit to doing one thing every day that moves your organization toward proactive maintenance. No matter how busy you are, take a few minutes to improve something. You don't need a lot of money to do some good. Collect equipment information from a nameplate and enter it into your work order system. Plan a job well. Say "thank you" when someone does the right thing. Smile. And, most importantly, share this idea with someone else. Lead the way! **MT**

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The opinions expressed in this Viewpoint section are those of the author, and don't necessarily reflect those of the staff and management of Maintenance Technology magazine.