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Friday, 16 November 2012 15:45

SMRP: Make it Personal And Prepare For The Future

SMRP, the Society for Maintenance & Reliability Professionals ("by professionals for professionals") has been celebrating its 20th Anniversary throughout 2012. Held in Orlando, FL, last month, this year's annual conference wasn't just a nod to two great decades, it was among the best of the best SMRP events ever.

It also offered one of the most revealing looks into the future of "maintenance and reliability" and our role in helping maintenance and reliability professionals prepare for that future.

But first, let's look at who/what made this year's annual event a success:

- 918 attendees (351 first-time attendees)
- 167 exhibitors
- 42 guests
- 46 states represented (Texas, South Carolina, Florida, Ohio and Minnesota, in that order, sent the most attendees)
- 23 foreign countries represented
- Top-five participating companies: Hormel (30), Michelin (26), Agrium (24), CBRE (15), Freeport McMoran Copper & Gold (13), Georgia Pacific (13) and Mundy Companies (13)

Attendees reflected a cross-section of industry types. Their companies represented the full spectrum of manufacturing and assembly, petro-chemical, specialty chemicals, fertilizers, foods, pharmaceuticals, primary metals, cement, mining, pulp and paper, healthcare, wood products, auto automotive manufacturing, pipelines, building materials, engineering services, power generation, public utilities and more. The attendees' job roles included senior executives, management, supervision, team leads, technicians of all types, maintenance mechanics and electricians, planners, schedulers, storeroom specialists and engineers of all types, from both union and non-union companies. While the audience was made up primarily by individuals in maintenance and reliability roles, it was punctuated with a number of others in production-operations and business-administration roles.

Many skilled and knowledgeable attendees of all ages proudly sported their Certified Maintenance & Reliability Professional (CMRP) and their Certified Maintenance and Reliability Technician (CMRT) badge ribbons for all to see. Certification exams were also offered to those who had not yet achieved these globally recognized and respected distinctions.

This year's annual conference offered 24 day-long workshops, 60 conference sessions and five outstanding local facility tours for intensive learning, plus networking with special interest groups, task forces and committees. Beyond that, one of the most valuable benefits came from networking with others from diverse groups and industries and exploring what new tools and technologies the nearly 70 vendor displays had to offer. This is the place where the serious maintenance and reliability professionals meet, learn, share and develop life-long professional friendships.

Thinking back to the beginnings of SMRP

Of course, there were those of us who attended the very first SMRP conference in Nashville, TN, in 1993. That one was a truly memorable event, with over 250 in attendance—*well up from the hoped-for number of 160 to break even*
! From that point on, the organizers and their followers continued to bring on dozens of like-thinking volunteers, recruits and kindred souls to spread the word and grow the unparalleled benefits of the SMRP. It took passion and action to build this association to attract and develop true professionals in maintenance and reliability across countless business and industry sectors. It took a powerful vision among SMRP's founders to set the stage for professional development and growth in workplace disciplines that were not always among the most appreciated: maintenance and reliability.

Discussions about future trends and roles of maintenance and reliability pros started with gusto at that first SMRP conference in Nashville. On the technical discipline side, we were learning about Reliability Centered Maintenance from the late John Moubray—*who had launched his RCM-II book in the USA in 1992*
. Fresh from the UK and hot off the press, the passion reflected in Moubray's book on the subject of RCM was unbounded.

At the same time, Total Productive Maintenance (TPM), with its focus on both the people and technical sides of maintenance, was gaining momentum. My own passion was for TPM, having learned the principles several years earlier through Seiichi Nakajima, the father of this methodology, as well as through ongoing work with several clients on their transformations.

We had many a debate at SMRP (often fueled by *Maintenance Technology*'s Founding (and long-serving) Editor Bob Baldwin) in panel discussions and over beverages: "So, will it be RCM or TPM, Engineering-technical solutions or culture change?" Baldwin would ask. While John Moubray's emphasis was clearly "RCM," we would eventually agree that the answer to both questions was "YES." (BTW: John Moubray passed away in January 2004, leaving with us huge legacy and his great passion for RCM-II).

Let the generational shift begin…

From my perspective, the 2012 SMRP conference served as a real window to our future. The "old guard" (Sorry guys… I'm one too) rubbed shoulders with rapidly growing numbers of young, bright-eyed, hungry-for-learning professionals and soon-to-be leaders in their industries and the SMRP. The gray hairs were teaching the new guard, and the new guard was telling stories of early successes from their own maintenance and reliability journeys. In some cases, long-time attendees had already passed the torch to their younger counterparts or were teaming at this year's event as mentors and coaches.

But, it's not just a human generational shift that's taking place: There's more—*much more*—shif ting in our profession. Maintenance and reliability is rapidly becoming a bigger competitive business advantage.

The new maintenance and reliability

The spectrum of "maintenance and reliability" is being expanded at a rapid pace. In many cases, this expansion is being accelerated because of a grossly under-estimated skills shortage coupled with the demands for longer-lived, more reliable, more profitable, safer and sustainable plants and facilities.

On one end of the spectrum are the technicians and maintainers: These are the folks that are graduating from turning wrenches to operating the new-tech tools of our trade. Their social networking and instant access to information on the World Wide Web easily surpasses anything that existed 20 years ago.

On the other end of the spectrum is the emerging field of "strategic asset management"—*power ful concepts for the future of physical capital-intensive businesses*
—represented by PAS 55 and ISO 55000. These global best practices are starting to show

significant results in cost savings, performance and reliability improvements associated with the hard assets we're used to dealing with: equipment, process systems and facilities.

Maintenance and reliability technicians are hungry for knowledge and skills. They want to hit the ground running in their roles—*if they're not already in the race.* Their needs are often different from what was traditionally offered through the SMRP. Basic maintenance skills refreshers and best practices for the plant-floor level are sorely needed due to failing public schools and decades of decline in trade and technical schools.

Yes, some of these schools may be coming back. But there's a generation of maintainers who have missed out on the skill sets needed in industry today (and tomorrow). They've learned on the job, from vendors and suppliers and from workshops and short courses. They're hungry for so much more. We need to figure out the best ways of delivering to them.

Strategic asset management is a whole new field on our horizon. But, it is much more than merely complying with PAS 55 and IS0 55000 for Asset Management. These new asset-management specifications and standards will require a whole new set of skills and knowledge beyond the technical reliability skills we've honed and fine-tuned for the past 20 years.

Asset management as codified in PAS 55 and ISO 55000 will require the skills of understanding strategic business cases, collaboration with others who are not typically part of the maintenance and reliability scope of work, and much more. People skills as well as technical skills will be in demand in our profession. Why? Maintenance and reliability management is a very small, but essential, subset of asset lifecycle management. We must master a variety of interdependent relationships and partnerships for the future of our assets and to be successful as maintenance and reliability professionals.

Now is the time to begin learning what is embodied in the new Asset Management specifications and standards. Because when it comes, it will likely be aimed at our businesses by business outsiders, launched by senior executives and sweep across our plants and facilities much like ISO-9000 Quality Management did a few decades ago. Insurance companies, investors and owners will likely demand it—*and plant leadership will respond accordingly*. Maintenance and reliability professionals have a considerable body of knowledge and best practices to apply to Asset Management, but we must learn how to engage ourselves in the process without trying to use the technical jargon of our trade.

Conquering new frontiers

The new frontiers for maintenance and reliability professionals will include—*but extend well beyond* —the foundations of maintenance and maintenance-management best practices. These frontiers will reach much further than reliability and maintainability, RCM and TPM and the latest EAM software. Strategic advantage will go to those businesses that can demonstrate better than best-in-class asset performance and reliability throughout the entire lifecycle of their equipment and facilities.

The Society for Maintenance and Reliability Professionals is a leading-edge organization with access to tens of thousands of members' experiences that we can harness in taking charge of our future. New frontiers are ready and waiting for us. Now is the time to learn, to grow and to challenge the traditional paradigms of maintenance and reliability. Now is the time for a whole new body of knowledge. Make it personal and prepare for the future. Thank you, SMRP, for 20 inspiring and wonderful years.

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