

An open window of opportunity

Written by Robert C. Baldwin, CMRP, Editor
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Robert C. Baldwin, CMRP, Editor For years, reliability and maintenance professionals have been complaining, a la Rodney Dangerfield, "we don't get no respect." Well, that may be changing. A window of opportunity may be opening to provide some C-level access. Although it may not open wide enough to climb through, it will likely open wide enough for conversation.

That conversation will focus on the goals of the enterprise and how they are to be met. Reliability and maintenance leaders will have an opportunity to respond and possibly sell some best practice concepts that previously fell on deaf ears.

What I have picked up from various conversations with speakers, exhibitors, and attendees at recent conferences (Society for Maintenance & Reliability Professionals and Noria's Practicing Oil Analysis) and a recent press briefing by Rockwell Automation, is that top management may be ready to listen.

The C-level (CEO, CFO, CIO, etc.) has invested heavily in enterprise level information systems to avoid the effects of Y2K and assure the enterprise has a solid infrastructure on which to base operations in the so-called new economy. Much of this activity has resulted in a flat or negative return on investment (ROI) because not much has happened at the bottom line.

Meanwhile, Wall Street is putting earnings performance under the microscope.

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Projections must be met or exceeded. Companies are responding by changing their behavior. They are more focused on the bottom line. They are embracing the elimination of waste through lean manufacturing, searching for best practices to assure operational excellence, and freeing up capital by eliminating excess inventory. The term "predictable capacity" is heard.

Return on net assets (RONA) fed by overall equipment effectiveness (OEE) is the primary metric of this new business era. Reliability and maintenance leadership that has done its homework and developed an implementation plan for processes and technology to improve RONA may find an eager ear at the C-level. (If you need a refresher on how reliability and maintenance performance connects to RONA and the bottom line, check out the article links in the box on the first page of our website at www.mt-online.com.)

The C-level will be looking for some quick wins. And reliability and maintenance is in a position to provide them. The installation of best practices can reduce substantially the indirect cost of manufacturing, and that's what C-level people want to hear.

You better be ready because it many not be hot air that's blowing through that open window of opportunity. **MT**

