Robert C. Baldwin, CMRP, Editor I've never been to a bad conference, one where I came away with nothing of value. Even when the conference is peripheral to maintenance, or completely outside the field, there are usually some ideas that can be adapted to improve your situation or at least trigger ideas about a new way of approaching familiar problems.

Getting outside the fence to mingle with people in different or associated fields pays dividends. It is like benchmarking outside your field to find world-class processes that can put you ahead of your competitors. Remember: If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you always got.

I took some time recently to attend the conference and exhibition produced by ISA-The Instrumentation, Systems, and Automation Society. Although the event, held in Chicago October 21-24, 2002, touched on some asset management topics, I was most intrigued by some ideas presented in a couple of process control oriented sessions.

Dick Morley, best known as the father of the PLC, chaired a wide-open discussion with the audience and panel members Shuzo Kaihori, president and CEO, Yokogawa Corporation of America; Jim Pinto, JimPinto.com; Ken Crater, Control.com; and John Berra, executive vice president, Emerson Process Solutions.

One of the questions from the floor asked what could be done to stop the IT bulldozer from

overrunning the process control field. One answer: it is probably inevitable. However, it was suggested that process control engineers prepare to take what they need from the change. The issue is not what department is in charge, but the results and value to the enterprise.

That exchange reminds me of the fear some in our community have about process control taking over condition monitoring and asset management. It really doesn't matter, in my opinion, as long as assets get managed to the level required by the enterprise.

In another session, Béla Lipták, author/editor of the three volume Instrument Engineers Handbook, told an intriguing story in his keynote lecture about being invited to a seminar at Harvard University to provide insight into process control techniques for participants who were dealing with social and economic issues. They were looking to process control for solutions. What Lipták imparted to the group is a fundamental tenet of his field—you must first understand the process before you can control it.

Which brings us to maintenance. There are too many people, inside and outside the profession, simply looking for answers to problems instead of trying to understand the process. **MT**