

Focus on Results and Change the Culture Along the Way

Written by Robert M. Williamson, Strategic Work Systems, Inc.
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Robert M. Williamson, Strategic Work Systems, Inc. "Here it comes again, another new maintenance program. I wonder how long this one will last?" Generally, every one of these initiatives has been well intentioned by the advocates, leaders, champions, and sponsors. What sets these ill-fated attempts apart from the initiatives that really worked?

Could it be that those initiatives actually showed a sizeable improvement? Most likely the people who were going to be affected were involved from the very early stages so they could influence their own future, and achieve the sustainable goals anticipated by the initiative.

But, the most important factor was that these initiatives led to sustainable business results that were undeniable. Executives, decision makers, mid- and first-line supervisors, and plant-floor people all saw results. They saw that they could make a difference. They changed their behavior.

There were high levels of buy-in, a sense of ownership emerged through involvement, and even some enthusiasm. Big business results were achieved and work actually got easier because the reactive nature of the old ways virtually disappeared.

Then, when we go back 5 or 10 years later little remains of the "initiative." Did it fail? Probably not. Success truly happens when the new behaviors and work processes of the initiative are assimilated into the organization, into the work culture, and into individual behavior. The bells and whistles of the "initiative" disappear. The desired strategic goals and objectives, the tactics and procedures, the expectations and reinforcing behaviors have all been set in place and are part of the way everyone thinks and acts.

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Without a doubt, equipment reliability is essential in an equipment-intensive operation. Reactive maintenance just won't cut it any more—it's too expensive.

So, how do you get everyone on board? Focus on results and change the culture along the way. I have seen this adage work many times in many different types of workplaces. These 12 steps really work:

1. **Follow the money.** Where are your highest equipment maintenance costs? List the top 10 equipment items.
2. **Follow the data.** What are the types of, or reasons for, failures? At this point "root cause" is optional information. List the top 10 reasons for the top 10 equipment items.
3. **Follow the interruptions.** Where is the highest amount of process downtime, or business/flow interruptions? List the top 10 equipment items.
4. **Connect the dots.** Look at your lists (Pareto chart work well here). Identify the highest cost equipment causing the highest levels of downtime. This will give you the top two or three equipment items for focused equipment improvements.
5. **Drill the data deeper.** For these top three equipment items identify the types of, or reasons for, failure (Pareto chart work well here, too).
6. **Follow the money (again).** Look into the purchasing records and find out the parts used to address the top two or three reasons for failure.
7. **Focus.** Target only one piece of equipment based on the data and information you have accumulated.

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8. **Find the right people.** Engage everyone who touches the targeted equipment, along with those who make decisions that affect the equipment performance, reliability, and costs. This group is the “team” who has enough power to make and sustain the necessary changes.

9. **Focus on results.** Use the “team-based” approach to make the problems go away using new skills and knowledge.

10. **Set new expectations.** Define in very specific terms what is expected of the entire team and of each person to move ahead with new and improved approaches to maintenance.

11. **Accountability.** Monitor the key performance indicators. Provide regular and timely feedback to the team. Recognize that the results of the equipment performance and reliability are direct consequences of how well the people, individually and collectively, are performing their new job roles (new behaviors).

12. **Leverage the gains.** Continue to make improvements on the targeted equipment as outlined in the previous 11 steps. When sustainable results can be seen review the data and begin addressing the next targeted piece of equipment using the same process.

I continue to be impressed with this approach. If it makes business sense, and if it makes sense to the people out on the plant floor, on the equipment, it will most likely be sustainable.

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