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Monday, 08 November 2010 15:02

We end this "Maintenance Partnership" series of articles as we began five years ago: by stressing that the maintenance department must acknowledge that it cannot—*and does not*—fu nction autonomously. Maintenance must recognize its success is based on a series of integral inter- and intra-departmental relationships that are set up and managed to provide mutual benefit for all partners.

> “Most powerful is he who has himself in his own power.” …Seneca

The secret behind all successful partnerships is recognizing the difference between "what you manage" and "what you control." For example, the maintenance department must manage all machine repairs due to bearing failure, regardless of the cause. Understanding and tracking the cause of failure will differentiate among maintenance-caused events, like lubrication failure; non-maintenance-caused failure events, like overloading (operations-caused); and cost-driven incorrect/sub-quality bearing choice (purchasing-caused). Maintenance-caused events are in the control of the maintenance department and can be eliminated through an improved maintenance process. Non-maintenance events—*although they are managed by maintenance* —require resolution through negotiation with partners.

Resolution is often best managed through the partnered development of a Memorandum Of Understandings (MOU) between maintenance and its partners, in which mutually beneficial agreements are scripted for each partnership. To be successful, maintenance must take the initiative in establishing MOUs and can facilitate the process by soliciting each potential partner and delivering an investment statement that details the roles of the partner and outlines the benefits of the partnership (inputs and outputs).

For a potential partner to "buy in" to the concept, maintenance must, from the start, establish its ability to consistently provide the necessary outputs to its partner, and more important, show that it has the mechanisms and capability to process inputs and turn those inputs into a measured target level of maintenance response, asset availability and asset reliability. As the soliciting partner, maintenance must prepare by understanding its current strengths and improvement opportunities, and by ensuring intra-departmental communication processes are successfully in place.

Over the course of our "Maintenance Partnership" series, we've seen that the maintenance department is a hub position, which—*like a spoke wheel*—is inexorably connected through itself to every perimeter department within the organization. The hallmark of a successful maintenance department is the partner recognition of a collaborative relationship that respects the needs and requirements of other corporate departments, coupled with a cognizance of internal maintenance-department needs and requirements and the importance of taking responsibility for itself. This level of partnership sustainability can be achieved in a five-step process.

Step 1: Continue to know thyself

Regularly review maintenance operation effectiveness. If your maintenance department continues to struggle with the concept of system management, job planning and open information-sharing—*finding it easier to take the path of least resistance typical of reactive environments based on personal agendas and limited responsibility* —you must perform a maintenance operation effectiveness review (MOER) to audit and score your current strengths and opportunities. This will allow you to take internal control of the maintenance operation. For those who have already done so, regular MOERs are in order (every one to two years) to establish the level of improvement and resetting of goals based on partnership agreement updates. These audits must address the following:

- Planning and scheduling
- Work-flow management
- Lubrication management
- Inventory control
- Failure prevention and analysis
- Performance indicators
- Management reporting

Step 2: Know thy future

Develop an engineered maintenance-improvement management action plan (MAP). This is a detailed project plan that plots a time-lined series of maintenance-improvement initiatives determined by studying the corporate and department vision, short-term and long-term goals and objectives, budgets and investment returns and preparing a phased implementation of projects that can capitalize on strengths, add measurable value to the maintenance function and be implemented within a specific time frame.

Building a MAP requires maintenance to work in partnership with other departments and

management to determine the validity of the project. This update process will continue to showcase maintenance and set the stage for partnership MOU development.

Step 3: Develop inter-departmental communication tools
Working effectively with your partners calls for them to deliver work requests based on minimum information requirements that will lead to planning, scheduling and performing work in a timely manner (inputs). In turn, maintenance will need to deliver communicative documentation regarding requisition needs, work completion and capability status (outputs).

Your ability to communicate effectively on an inter-departmental basis will show your partners that you have the ability to consistently provide outputs to help them—*as well as be able to act on the input information provided to you.*

Step 4: Develop partnership input/output matrices
The maintenance-improvement initiatives set out in the MAP will require the collaboration of many partnerships to achieve success. For example, ongoing maintenance work calls for purchasing to buy products and/or services on time; production to release the asset; engineering to prepare/change specs; and vendors and contractors to provide delivery of goods and services, etc. As MOUs are established, the requirements of both sides of the partnership can be built into an input/output matrix that will facilitate understanding of the commitments undertaken by the parties.

Step 5: Meet your partners on a regular basis
A MOU should always be a working or living document in which both sides agree to work within the agreement for a period of no less than six months. At such time, the partners can choose to meet and review the agreements for which adherence is difficult and agree to any change requirements, again cementing said agreements for an additional six months of trial. Improvement is a continual process: As your company changes direction, so must your maintenance approach. Now is not the time to procrastinate—*it's a time to innovate*. (Going forward, you'll be hearing much more from me about that concept as it specifically applies to maintenance and reliability. I'll want to hear about it from you, too.)

Staying proactive (and being innovative) in your dealings with numerous partners can be taxing, but nowhere near as taxing as having to play "catch up" on unauthorized or non-negotiated changes. It may or may not be a war out there, today, but the following end-quote is just as relevant and compelling as when it first appeared in *The Art of War* (more than 2000 years

ago):

**"Whoever is first in the field and awaits the coming of the enemy will be fresh for the fight; whoever is second in the field and has to hasten to battle will arrive exhausted." ..
.Sun Tzu**

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