Written by Ken Bannister, Contributing Editor
Saturday, 01 November 2008 00:00

Ken Bannister, Contributing Editor For many of us, the unfolding economic news of the past few months has forced us to view our world with very different eyes. It's like nothing we've ever seen before.

The United States and the rest of the world now seem to be taking solace in a silver lining represented by the "changing of the guard" in Washington. Although the new administration clearly has a formidable task in front of it, people everywhere are looking forward to what can be achieved with a degree of anticipation and hope that has not been seen in quite a while.

You can be sure the new administration recognizes two things: 1) the burden it has to make the right decisions; and 2) the catalyst for change opportunity it has. The situation is not very different from what we often experience in an industrial setting.

Whenever asked to help a corporation, company or department to implement a continuous improvement program of any kind, one of the first questions I ask the group that will manage or be affected by the upcoming change is, "Have you ever come across a policy, procedure or business process that didn't make sense, yet is currently followed or enforced at your workplace?" Rarely is the answer "no." In fact, these seemingly "unintelligent on purpose" policies, procedures and processes (PPPs) force us to look at the past and try to understand the decision process that forced their initial and continued adoption, and determine if the adoption cause, and/or the resulting PPPs, are still in any way relevant.

Attitudes, politics and necessity make for strange bedfellows. They also dictate approaches that seemingly make no sense during later "administrations." Understanding and communicating this

will serve as a first stage catalyst for change in that it will rationalize the acts of previous management administrations, and allow current personnel to "let go" of previous negative feelings through involvement in both the determination and improvement process.

Using the "changing of the guard" (see page 3, March/April 2008 issue of Lubrication Management & Technology) as a catalyst to enact change is arguably the most powerful and effective change management event one can use to produce a positive paradigm shift with minimum resistance. This type of catalyst is available any time a new owner, or division, department or process manager, is appointed. Not only can it be used to make positive change, it should be used—every time. Management, however, does not have to be changed to gain this type of effective catalyst.

We also can choose to appoint specialized positions that show recognition of the need for and importance of the change management program. For example, where no dedicated lubrication personnel previously existed, the appointment of one or two lubrication specialists or a lubrication manager to implement a lubrication management program makes a positive statement that change is occurring. Moreover, it indicates that management now views a lubrication program as a worthy endeavor. While this simple "reframing" exercise requires virtually no capital outlay, it does call for an actual (and meaningful) change management plan to back it up.

Other successful change catalysts can include the introduction of new technology or management software tools. Most people believe the purchase of a new tool will generally simplify and improve upon processes using the replaced tools. In general, this is true. More importantly, though, most people will consent—without prejudice— to a change in their behavior through merely changing or updating tools.

To assure the success of a new program or initiative, adopt a change catalyst that allows you to validate the PPPs that offer value—and flush away those that don't. Doing so, you offer people a positive outlook and a ray of hope for the company's future—and their own. Good Luck!

kbannister@engtechindustries.com