Written by Bob Baldwin, Editor
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Last month when I discussed two massive monuments to a bygone industrial era, the Cornish pumping engine and the Quincy mine steam hoist, I noted that the romantic good old days were not all that good. But people still wish for simpler times when the industrial scene was less complicated.

Not so long ago, machinery reacted reasonably well to the application of an acetylene torch or a sledge hammer. Today, the torch and hammer approach will destroy precision components such as antifriction bearings. Similar change has taken place in the electrical area where there is concern about harmonics and waveforms.

But these changes are only differences in parts, tools, and techniques. What people really miss, I think, is the protection of the old mass production mentality which was simple and straight forward. Technology was applied to allow workers to work harder and faster. Today, we are being asked not only to work harder and faster, but also smarter and to tighter tolerances. The tools and technology are up to the new challenge but I'm not sure about some business management practices.

In the good old days, inventory was your friend--a buffer that could accommodate the inevitable breakdowns.

Today, inventory is the enemy--a drag on investment, and there is no longer such a buffer to cover mistakes.

In the good old days, maintenance personnel could just focus on fixing things when they broke.

Today, maintenance personnel must manage the equipment and attend to it before it breaks. If it does break, they must find out what happened and reduce the risk of it happening again.

In the good old days, maintenance managers worked on improving repair efficiency. They were measured on how fast they could get the equipment back on line.

Today, maintenance managers must also focus on reliability and work on improving maintenance effectiveness. Mean time between failure is now a part of the matrix for measuring performance.

In the good old days, management furnished maintenance with torches and hammers.

Today, management is still making sure maintenance has a good supply of torches and hammers. But what about advanced technology and training? On the other hand, maybe this is as good as it gets. Perhaps maintenance managers back in the good old days had to go to the mat and fight for every torch and hammer they got.

Thanks for stopping by,