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"I am doing the best that I can, but it's not enough. The other crew doesn't seem to care about the equipment here. They beat it up ... run it dry ... don't put things back. They just don't seem to understand that our future, OUR jobs, depend on taking care of this equipment so we can take care of our customers. The practice of good stewardship is lost."

Those who are closest to the equipment and processes are the ones who can make or break the competitive position of the business. Quite often, our challenge is to help everyone understand and appreciate that, if we abuse or ignore equipment problems, we are potentially opening the door to the competition — *here or in a foreign country*. The longer we tolerate the lack of good stewardship of our businesses' capital assets, the more the attitude becomes: *"Why should I care? I've cared in the past and others came along and systematically undermined everything I tried to do. And nobody did anything to prevent that."*

Being good stewards

Many people in today's workplace truly care. They are doing their best to take care of equipment and tools in their workplaces. Their watchful eyes prevent damage that hurts business. They understand that when their plant or facility is running right, their customers are satisfied, management is happy, work is easier and their jobs are more secure than if they didn't care. But it's more than just maintaining things the way we've always done ...

"Maintenance" means sustaining desired levels of performance. In our business, this translates into equipment, process and facility reliability. Good maintenance assures the capacity to produce desired products. Therefore, maintenance in its purest form really is "stewardship" — *w hich can be defined as the personal responsibility to take care of something owned by someone else*
. But, stewardship goes well beyond those with "maintenance" job titles.

In a reliable and competitive plant or facility, anybody who makes decisions or takes actions that affect equipment performance and reliability are stewards. They all know how their actions affect the revenue-generating capacity of the operations. There is a common focus, a shared vision about the importance of the capital assets and the investments of owners and shareholders and their personal roles and responsibilities in assuring reliable and stable operations. Think of NASCAR race teams. They must have reliable race cars just to *qualify* for a race. NASCAR teams truly practice good stewardship.

In an unreliable, problem-prone plant or facility struggling to compete, there are those who don't seem to care, as noted in the opening statement of this column. Unfortunately, it takes just a few non-caring individuals to undermine the stability and reliability of a process or facility. That's the thing about "reliability." One person could upset the balance and cause unplanned downtime or inefficient operations, which, in turn, would lead to higher costs.

Mastering the art

It may not be easy, but mastering the art of stewardship can be well worth the effort — *especiall y considering the alternative*
. At first blush, it would seem that the concept of caring responsibly for property owned by others would be simple to embrace. What makes it so difficult to achieve in today's workplaces? Is it the "not my job" attitude? Is it a "why should I care" mindset? Or, is it that most people have not been taught the benefits of being a "good steward" on the job?
Here are areas on which to focus when developing and/or strengthening a culture of stewardship within our organizations:

First: Shared vision...

There must be a very clear "shared organization vision" that emphasizes the critical importance of individual contributions. Communicating a "vision for stewardship" should address the benefits and the "WIIFMs" (what's in it for me) when we take care of the equipment and processes.

Second: Organization values...

The organization's "values" — *the beliefs that encourage individual and group behaviors and support the "vision"* — are crucial. Here is where senior leadership earns its stripes: modeling and consistently communicating the fundamental organizational values, which, in themselves, are not overly complicated. Values that support good stewardship might include quality, safety, reliability and empowerment.

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Third: Work environment...
The work environment is key. Allowing conditions that communicate "our vision is just words and not actions" prevents people from believing in said vision. Consistency of these conditions is enormously important. No person, office or crew can be exempt. Starting in one critical area of the plant or facility and building a culture of good stewardship shows what can be done and what is expected in your organization. Or, if a stewardship culture already exists in one or more critical areas, showcase them as "islands of excellence." People in those areas are showing responsible care for their equipment and processes. Leverage the experience in these islands to expand to other areas.

Fourth: Personnel decisions and actions...
When it comes to personnel decisions and actions, leadership cannot afford to show favoritism. Nor can leaders look the other way when the organization's values or work environments are compromised. For example, if taking care of the maintenance shops means organization and orderliness, where tools and supplies are easy to access and fit for service, where tools and equipment are properly maintained and stored and where the work area is well-lit and safe, leadership has to reinforce that standard. When another shop looks like a bomb went off and clutter abounds, but nothing is done to change it, others will soon believe that leadership has a double standard. That type of double standard will undermine the values and beliefs and prevent good stewardship from prevailing.

Fifth: Leadership, leadership, leadership...
One of the major elements in mastering the art of stewardship is LEADERSHIP. From senior levels to those on the front line, all leaders are heading in the same direction. What does that look like? Read on and take notes.

- Leadership must be able to SEE that the "vision for stewardship" is important for business success and important for their personal satisfaction and success.

- Leadership must honestly BELIEVE that this is the right thing to do.

- Leadership must be able to articulate their belief, to TALK it and to WALK THE TALK.
- Leadership must TEACH others in their areas of responsibility. That is, they must motivate others through coaching, encouragement and recognition.

Leadership that "walks the talk" is vital. Good stewardship means that people look after the equipment and the work areas in ways that allow potential problems to be spotted before they turn into failures or unplanned downtime. Leaders must put this vision and the supporting values into action. When they observe conditions that go against what is defined as good stewardship, they must communicate where the gap is, what should be done to treat the equipment properly and, most importantly, why this is of significance. If needed, leaders must provide assistance or resources — *or make time* — to help personnel learn what good stewardship looks like. **MT**

Stewardship In Our Lives

Synonyms of "stewardship" include "care, custody, guardianship, watchfulness and vigilance." Notice the theme of responsibility for something that likely belongs to others? There are many examples of stewardship in our lives...

Corporate stewardship, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, refers to how businesses manage the resources under their own control, including the long-term maximization of financial, social and environmental assets and the "total" return on investment for the individual company.

Financial or fiscal stewardship refers to the practice of assuring that current spending programs and tax policies are affordable and sustainable over time.

Environmental stewardship of process equipment is needed to reduce the release of hazardous pollutants from processing plants and minimize the number of injuries to plant operators and members of the public that can result from such releases. The chemical industry refers to their stewardship as *"Responsible Care."*

Scriptural (Jewish, Christian, Islamic) stewardship invests humans with a moral responsibility in safeguarding God's creation and to faithfully care for all that has been entrusted to a believer.

Equipment stewardship means that we, the employees working with and on the "company's equipment," have the responsibility to ensure that it operates properly throughout its life cycle and is not abused or damaged. Taking care of the very assets that produce wages and salaries and make businesses successful in the eyes of the customers, the employees and the owners or shareholders is good stewardship.

For those in our line of work, a vision for good stewardship can be summed up as follows:

"Our facilities, our processes and our equipment are critical to our business success. Our product quality, our employees' safety, our equipment reliability and performance depend on how well we care for these assets. We provide the skills and knowledge that are needed in order to empower our employees to be good stewards of everything they use in their jobs."

See it, believe it, talk it, walk it and teach it. We can make a difference as good stewards.

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