



Ken Bannister, Contributing Editor

"Equipment Maintenance problems do not belong to the maintenance manager; equipment maintenance problems do not belong to the maintainer; equipment maintenance problems, once accepted for investigation and repair by the maintenance department, belong to the maintenance team."

One of the hallmarks of a successful maintenance operation is its cognitive ability to recognize and responsibly manage its customers' needs and requirements, and its own. Today's maintainer usually is well aware of the benefits of teamwork wherein the sum of the whole—*or combined team strength*—surpasses any person's individual strength. Ask any maintainer who has belonged to a "winning team" in the past about that experience and he/she usually will characterize it as nothing less than "magical."

So, if teamwork and its benefits are so desirable, why isn't every maintenance department consciously striving to develop a winning teambased approach? The answer is simple. In any form of chaotic working environment—*devoid of any process or procedure*—in which individual maintainers operate autonomously, acting as their own parts buyers, planners and schedulers, it is extremely difficult to find time to communicate with and relate to maintenance peers in a proactive manner.

The benefits of teamwork can only be reaped through understanding, recognition of need to change and structured peer communication. By allowing and encouraging an open communication environment, acknowledging and capitalizing on each other's strengths and working toward clearly defined goals, we can foster true teamwork. Peer connection—*or intra-departmental communication*—is vital for maintenance department success, which precedes and provides the essential ingredient for successful inter-departmental connections, or partnership relationships previously

addressed by this column.

Promoting peer connection

Many maintenance departments struggle with the concepts of system management, job planning/ scheduling and open information sharing. Sometimes they appear content to simply fall back into a known path of working in a total reactive environment based on personal agendas and limited responsibility. Under such a regime, cliques that encourage maintenance individuals or groups to work against another often are formed. When this happens, all maintainers complain of lack of respect and low morale.

Breaking out of a destructive pattern like this calls for a time-lined, structured maintenance management program that recognizes both the present and future state of maintenance. This type of program incorporates a management action plan to achieve both corporate and maintenance department goals within a stated time frame. Any maintenance management program implemented along these lines will promote peer interactivity through the following:

- **Building on existing knowledge:** Industrial equipment is idiosyncratic in nature; similar equipment will perform differently dependent upon usage patterns and maintenance history. Certain maintainers become expert at understanding this idiosyncratic nature and are able to diagnose and repair specific equipment problems faster than others. Involving these individuals and their expertise in a PM optimization program harnesses and shares their unique understanding of certain equipment pieces in the development of meaningful PM job tasks. Allowing them to build the program in conjunction with other maintainers opens up a forum for the sharing of strengths and knowledge, as well as an avenue to informal peer training sessions. The result is a consistent maintenance approach based on the equipment's needs in its working environment and a shared responsibility among all maintainers.
- **Sharing of failure information:** Implementation and utilization of fault or failure analysis programs enable maintainers to succinctly define and share equipment failure data with one another. Defining and capturing failure information on the closed work enables maintainers to research equipment history and quickly determine if the equipment failure is repetitive or not. This allows the maintainer to better perform a planned repair at the root cause level, thereby reducing downtime and eliminating unnecessary repairs.
- **Adopting a consistent approach:** Working together to develop policies, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and standardized work processes allows the maintenance group to work and bond as a team and develop consistency and trust in each other's approach to the maintenance process.
- **Promoting peer interaction:** New communication tools (e-mail, CMMS, white boards, etc.), increased self-esteem and pride in workmanship all work to promote peer interaction at shift changeover time when work is passed from one shift to the next shift. Efficient work

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completion and improved work quality are more likely to result with improved shift changeover communications.

- **Setting and surpassing goals and targets:** With a Management Action Plan in place, maintenance successes can be tangibly tracked and reported to management. Nothing stimulates both self-esteem and respect more than being on a successful winning team, which in turn promotes healthy dialogue and the open sharing of information among peers.

As stated at the beginning of this article, equipment maintenance problems DO NOT belong to any one individual, but rather to the maintenance department as a whole. If maintenance problems are to be successfully resolved, it will be accomplished most efficiently through departmental teamwork, promoted by a healthy peer partnership. **MT**

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