

## Flip the Gearheads

Written by Robert C. Baldwin, CMRP, Editor  
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Robert C. Baldwin, CMRP, Editor In the last issue, I complained about gearheads, people who have a tendency to focus on tactical gear-oriented solutions to reliability and maintenance issues before dealing with more important strategic issues. I used some sports analogies to suggest that investment in maintenance technologies without a rational reliability strategy is similar to buying the finest cele-brity-branded sports gear without spending time in physical training and practice of the fundamentals of the sport. The gearhead's performance probability won't change significantly because sports gear isn't worth much in the absence of training.

While attending the International Maintenance Conference (IMC) last month in Nashville, I had time to rethink my stand and see the flip side of my gearhead prejudice. Conference speakers and attendees explored the pros and cons of various tactical solutions to maintenance problems. A number of presentations focused on gear, with the thought that understanding technology will increase options for the strategist.

Like most of my conference presentations, my talk at IMC made reference to material from *The Book of Five Rings (Go Rin No Sho)*, a classic guide to strategy by the 16th-century samurai, Miyamoto Musashi. I pointed out that, according to Musashi, "You should not have a favorite weapon. To become over-familiar with one weapon is as much a fault as not knowing it sufficiently well. You should not copy others, but use weapons which you can handle properly."

On the flip side, without understanding a variety of weapons, the strategy of the warrior (or the reliability and maintenance professional) can be limited severely.

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There is a difference between a gearhead's compulsion to own the latest technology and what should be a reliability and maintenance strategist's compulsion to understand technology and choose the solutions that are most congruent with the organization's strategy.

Although I have urged gearheads to grow up by trading their technology fixation for a broader strategic view of reliability and maintenance strategy, I'm also now advocating the flip side—suggesting that reliability and maintenance leaders should cultivate the gearhead's thirst for information about technology. After all, if you don't keep up with technology, you're like a manager of financial assets that doesn't bother to monitor interest rates or check out various investment vehicles.

If you are being paid to fight for reliability and availability of equipment assets, you should become familiar with all the weapons in the reliability arsenal. **MT**

