Overheard in a restaurant recently: "Did you hear about the Auto Service Center in town? It closed last week. The guys who owned it finally decided to retire. Remember how many years we looked for good mechanics? They were real good, weren't they? Never disappointed us. Always found a problem before something fell apart. Prices were fair, service was fastÑwe never had to wait on parts. They really knew what they were doing, didn't they? Why, they were ASE-certified and factory-trained to work on our cars. They had the latest factory technical bulletins and recall notices, and they notified us whenever it was time for our regular service. They treated us so well all these years; we're really going to miss them. Where do we go, now?"

The concern voiced in this conversation makes sense, doesn't it? When you finally discover a good mechanic or service center to take care of your personal car or truck, you really can tell the difference in how well it runs. It gets better mileage. The tires last longer. Major problems rarely happen. The mechanics seem to take personal pride in their work—and it shows!

What if you had to take your vehicle to the "Busted Knuckle Garage," where the mechanics aren't trained to work on your make and model? Where they don't have the right technical information or maintenance and repair manuals? Where the goal is to fix things fast and cheap, and "accuracy" and "workmanship" are not priorities? Where it might require three to four trips to the shop before a problem is actually fixed? Where the wait for parts could be several hours—or several days? And what about those greasy finger prints left on the steering wheel, door and hood? We would tend to avoid this type of service, wouldn't we?

Sadly, in many plants and facilities today, we're doing "Busted Knuckle Garage" service on our most critical equipment, yet we're still expecting it to run right!

Why is it that companies can spend millions (sometimes hundreds of millions) of dollars on equipment and facilities and still come up short when it comes to maintenance and training? Why do the decision makers assume that "Charlie" and "Ruth"Ñwith their years of experience in the plant—can just "figure things out" on the newest high-tech equipment? But, don't stop there. Let's throw another monkey wrench into this example.

What if the operators aren't trained on the equipment-specific requirements, settings, specs and set-up procedures? (Untrained operators are causing more and more equipment problems in plants today.) Then, send in some untrained maintenance folks to fix the problem. You guessed

it; they don't have the right tools or parts, either.

At this point, the equipment has to run longer and harder to make up for all the unplanned downtime. Monthly preventive maintenance tasks are deferred, for weeks—or even months. Consequently, the equipment breaks down even more.

It is a vicious cycle. Airplane pilots know this as a "death spiral" that you can't pull out of. How, then, can we possibly expect our equipment to run right and our costs to be low?

Here's how you can avoid the "Busted Knuckle Garage" syndrome:

- Focus on your plant's most critical, most problematic, constraint equipment in the plant.
- Gather the equipment documentation and bulletins.
- Identify the skills and knowledge required to make it run right—both operations and maintenance.
- Train the right people in the right skills.
- Identify the proper operations and maintenance procedures.
- Train the right people to properly perform the tasks.
- Identify the proper PM tasks and intervals.
- Train the right people to perform the right PMs.
- Plan and schedule the PMs.
- Fix things that are broken, jumpered, bypassed, leaking or worn out.
- Stock the right spares and keep them in serviceable condition.
- Document all work on the equipment in the work-order system.
- Use equipment repair and maintenance history to identify and address weaknesses.
- Then, when you really get down to it, look at TOTAL DOWNTIME losses. You may see what I've seen for years: maintenance can't do it alone. More than 90% of major equipment losses are outside the direct control of maintenance.

Finally, be sure to share the "Busted Knuckle Garage" story with top management. Where would they prefer to take their cars for service?—Robert Williamson, Strategic Work Systems, Inc., e-mail: RobertMW2@cs.com ; Internet: www.swspitcrew.com

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