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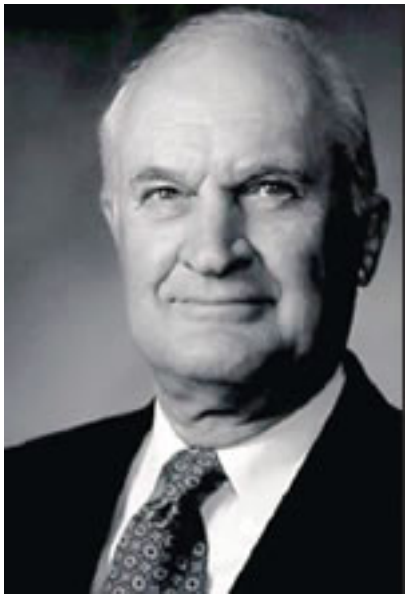

Paul D. Tomlingson, Principal Consultant, Paul D. Tomlingson Associates, Inc. World-class maintenance is the pinnacle of achievement for most maintenance organizations whether they maintain plant equipment, tend to mobile equipment or perform facility maintenance. It results when the organization consistently produces reliable equipment with an efficient organization, carries out an effective program and effectively uses quality information to help yield a highly profitable operation. The plant is characterized by a cooperative production group and supportive staff organizations (like warehousing). It is led by a visionary plant manager who has created an environment for success with a sound production strategy, clear department objectives and policies that guarantee harmonious departmental interaction. Its employees enjoy great personal satisfaction and its customers know they are dealing with a quality organization.

As the 'working' definition suggests, specific criteria must be met. Any single criterion (such as consistently reliable equipment) results from extraordinary performance of people in effectively executing well-conceived program elements.

How does an organization identify the people and program performance levels they must meet? Performance standards, the use of KPIs (key performance indicators) and even benchmarking come to mind. Which is best? Are all of them useful? Who should establish them?

Is the term 'world-class' taken too casually in a society where we identify Super Bowl winners as 'world champions' of a game played only in North America? Can true world-class

maintenance performance levels be defined by an organization not knowing what similar plants in Norway or South Africa are actually doing and how well? Similarly, could consultants come closer if their experience were based on many plants of numerous corporations in the same industry?

Are performance levels likely to be different for mining versus food processing? Could some performance standards derive from principles of maintenance management and be applicable uniformly– regardless of industry or activity?

Once performance standards are established, candidate organizations should evaluate current performance against them to establish their position on the world-class pathway.An evaluation is the first step of improvement. It determines the 'as is' status of the organization against the desired performance standards. It also defines improvement needs and their priorities.

Evaluation results identify satisfactory performance as well, and are the basis for the improvement plan. Repeat evaluations measure progress toward meeting the final standards. But, which method of evaluating is best? Performance standards should be updated as technical innovations, enhanced managerial techniques or improved information technology are introduced into the maintenance discipline.

World-class maintenance status should not be a 'catchphrase' if an organization is serious about improving maintenance. It requires definition. It cannot be self-proclaimed, as some might be tempted to do. Performance levels necessary to meet world-class criteria must be capable of being measured in some logical way, allowing organizations to determine what they must do to get there, as well as to know when they have arrived. **MT**

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