

The Best And The Worst

Written by Ken Bannister, Contributing Editor
Saturday, 01 September 2007 00:00



Ken Bannister, Contributing Editor I recently delivered a lubrication fundamentals seminar to a group of maintainers, whose first language was not English. My opening slide depicted a 10-year-old child during the Industrial Revolution, whose job was to ensure all line shafts used to power textile mill machinery were lubricated effectively. The above Dickens quote framed the image and worked well to capture the essence of the period—or so I thought. Once I realized that the class participants were unfamiliar with Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* and the Industrial Revolution, I had to explain to them my thinking behind the rhetoric and double meaning used in the slide. In doing so, I was forced to reflect on my rationale for using the slide and was surprised at just how timeless and meaningful the words and image are.

Dickens crafted his "best of times, worst of times" line—a line that became one of the most famous openings in English literature—as a way to set a tone for his portrayal of events leading up to the French Revolution. Interestingly, this historical novel was written as another important revolution was taking place—one of the greatest to date—the Industrial Revolution.

Although Dickens was alluding to the contrast between "modern" 18th century ways of life and thinking in London and Paris, and the "traditional" brutality and suppression carried out by nobility and peasants alike, his thoughts also were likely influenced by the sweeping industrial and technological changes swirling about him at the time. No wonder his words seem so profound and insightful, and that they continue to be as relevant today as when he wrote them. Take, for example, the changes occurring within our own Information Revolution.

Never before has the world witnessed such sophisticated levels of technology and communication. As a result, however, we have become so reliant on technology that we have for the most part forgotten the fundamentals, forcing ourselves into a pervasive "replace vs. repair" mentality. This approach, though, stops being a viable strategy once the technology becomes depreciated, with no more replacement parts available.

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Although today's communication is enacted at lightning speeds, the art of correspondence seems to be failing just as rapidly. While we appear to be enthralled by the amassing of vast stores of data, rarely do we take the initiative or time to turn this data into information through which true management decisions are made.

We also appear to have become so preoccupied with predicting failure that many have neglected— or have never learned—the basics of effective planning and scheduling to get the impending failure addressed prior to a catastrophic event. Likewise, cleanliness and lubrication, the cornerstones of virtually every new and existing physical asset management strategy, have never been better understood. Still, many companies today continue to neglect these most fundamental of machine care tactics.

Maybe now is the time to do things better. Let's take a leaf out of the "lean" strategy manual. Let's slow down the pace. Let's really know what we are trying to achieve. Let's build management strategies based on clear communication and the understanding of maintenance fundamentals when laying out our programs' foundations. To borrow more words from Dickens, these from the final line of a Tale of Two Cities, "It is a far, far better thing I do..." Today, we all can do better. Good luck!

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