

From Our Perspective: An Emperor Without Clothes?

Written by Ken Bannister, Contributing Editor
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Remember the story of "The Emperor's New Clothes?" Once upon a time, a vain Emperor engaged the services of two swindlers masquerading as weavers, who promised to make him a suit from magic cloth. Amazingly, the new clothes would be visible only to persons competent and fit for their jobs.

Thus, when sent to check on the progress of the project, the Emperor's representatives reported that the non-existent suit was magnificent! Had they admitted there were no clothes, they would have been labeled incompetent or unfit!

Checking for himself, the Emperor also proclaimed the new clothes to be magnificent, lest he, too, be deemed incompetent or unfit for his position. Only when he ostensibly donned his magic finery and paraded in public did a child—*with no position to protect*—clarify what was painfully obvious: that the Emperor was naked. Still, the Emperor continued to proudly march on.

This fairy tale is a metaphor, of course. For our purposes, it can be used to describe a management that chooses to believe it has an effective program in place, and those working in the program who see the reality (or pretense), but choose not to be contrary for fear of reprisal.

Visiting a self-proclaimed "World-Class" facility recently, I was surprised to hear managers claim they had simultaneously implemented their maintenance program based on Lean Maintenance, Overall Equipment Effectiveness (OEE), Reliability Centered Maintenance (RCM), Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) and Preventive/Predictive Maintenance (PM/PdM). This "combined approach," they avowed, had led to huge gains in equipment uptime and reliability—*despite an asset management system that wasn't set up to report Mean Time Between Failure or Availability*

. Apparently, management felt its level of investment in the system had to be producing the desired effect!

Unfortunately, in examining the plant's lubrication-management program, I found the typical PM job task "Lubricate as necessary" still in use, with the program's success relying on a recently created "oiler" position. The new "oiler" had been chosen primarily because of seniority. Lacking

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any experience with lubricants or their application, he believed that the purchase of new grease guns constituted a lubrication-management program!

Many of the maintainers with whom I spoke off the record considered the new maintenance approach to be "smoke and mirrors"—*and confusing and detrimental to asset health*. They further believed there was no real program in place, but felt unable in these economic times to criticize the situation, albeit constructively, in front of management. Not surprisingly, maintainers had not been part of the program-implementation team.

Having visited hundreds of facilities in similar denial over the years, I've continued to be stunned (and saddened) by the type of short-sighted approach that views the creation of an "oiler" position and purchase of new grease guns as state-of-the-art lubrication management. If your lubrication efforts are in this type of disarray, and your Emperor has no clothes, let this magazine be your voice. Leverage the tips, strategies and solutions you find in our pages to show management the real meaning of a "Best-Practice Lubrication Program." Good luck!

And what about the "World-Class" operations referred to earlier? As a consultant, I was the "child" who pointed out the absence of "clothes." Alas, to date at this plant, the Emperor has chosen to proudly (and nakedly) march on. **LMT**

kbannister@engtechindustries.com