Focus on Results… and Change the Culture Along the Way (Part 3)

"*Here it comes again: another new maintenance program. I wonder how long this one will last?*"

Have your attempts to improve equipment maintenance and reliability been met with similar reactions from the workforce or from first line leadership? In many of today's workplaces, people have become jaded. Years of attempts to do things better or differently have left many people skeptical. Maybe you've been there yourself. Count the number of improvement initiatives that you have personally seen come and go in your working years. Each of these initiatives has probably been well intentioned by the advocates, leaders, champions, and sponsors. What sets these ill-fated attempts apart from the breakthrough improvements that led to sustainable results and new behaviors?

Look at the initiatives that have worked. You can probably think of a few. Why did they succeed? Could it be that these initiatives actually showed a sizeable improvement? Most likely, the people who were going to be affected were involved from the very early stages so they could influence their own future and achieve the sustainable goals anticipated by the initiative. But the most important factor was probably that these initiatives led to undeniable, sustainable business results. Did top executives, decision makers, mid- and first-line supervision, and plant-floor people all see results? Did they see that they could make a difference and therefore changed their behavior?

Then, in many businesses, almost like clockwork, someone comes along with the better mouse trap. New management has a "new idea" for improving maintenance and reliability. They ignore past results, and they ignore what made prior initiatives succeed or fail. And then they set down railroad tracks for the new journey that they expect everyone to follow. Why? Because they saw (or heard of) it working somewhere else. So the skepticism starts all over again. *"Another uninformed manager is taking us down the path of most resistance and expecting big things to happen fast."*

What about the improvement initiatives that really made a difference? People got on board. There were high levels of buy-in, a sense of ownership emerged through involvement, and there was even some enthusiasm. Big business results were achieved, and work actually got easier because the reactive nature of the old ways virtually disappeared. Then, when we go look back five or ten years later, little remains of the initiative. Did it fail? Probably not. Success truly happens when new behaviors and work processes are assimilated into the organization, into the work culture, and into individual behavior. The bells and whistles of the "initiative" disappear, and rightfully so. The desired strategic goals and objectives, the tactics and procedures, the expectations and reinforcing behaviors have all been set in place and are part of the way everyone thinks and acts. When you look for the bells and whistles of the "initiative," they are mostly gone because they are no longer needed. That is success.

Without a doubt, equipment reliability is essential in an equipment-intensive operation. Reactive maintenance just won't cut it any more; it's too expensive. The cost of repairs is expensive: parts, labor, and planned work interruption. But the cost of downtime is significantly more expensive: damage to work in process, lost production, lost revenues, business interruptions, dissatisfied customers, frustrated employees, and massive amounts of non-productive time.

So, how do you get everyone on board? *Focus on results and change the culture along the way*. I have seen this work time and time again in many different types of workplaces. The following 12 steps really work:

1. **Follow the money.** Where are your highest equipment maintenance costs? List the top ten equipment items.

2. **Follow the data.** What are the types of or reasons for failures? At this point, "root cause" is optional information. List the top ten reasons for the top ten equipment items.

3. **Follow the interruptions.** Where is the highest amount of process downtime or business/flow interruptions? List the top ten equipment items.

4. **Connect the dots.** Look at your lists (A Pareto chart work well here). Identify the highest cost equipment causing the highest levels of downtime. This will give you the top two or three equipment items for focused equipment improvements.

5. **Drill the data deeper**. For these top three equipment items, identify the types of or reasons for failure (A Pareto chart work well here too).

6. **Follow the money (again)**. Look into the purchasing records and find out the parts used to address the top two or three reasons for failure.

7. **Focus**. Target only one piece of equipment based on the data and information accumulated in the first six steps. The goals: eliminate downtime, reduce O&M costs, improve throughput (revenues) in a sustainable manner.

8. **Find the right people**. Engage everyone who touches the targeted equipment, along with those who make decisions that affect the equipment performance, reliability, and costs. Don't forget about the contractors and the original equipment manufacturers or representatives. This group is the "team" who has enough power to make and sustain the necessary changes.

9. **Focus on results**. Draw on the team-based approach to make the problems go away using new skills and knowledge. Address operator involvement. Improve the preventive/predictive maintenance. Develop/improve maintenance procedures. Enforce work order compliance and accuracy. Address spare parts purchasing, storage, and inventory levels. Train, train, train for proper equipment operation and maintenance, for effective use of the managed maintenance process. Improve the equipment for ease of maintenance and operations. Determine the key performance indicators that should me monitored (availability, efficiency, quality, costs, MTBF, MTTR, etc.).

10. **Set new expectations**. Define, in very specific terms, what is expected of the entire team and of each person to move ahead with new and improved approaches to maintenance. Dedicate a sub-team to follow-up, monitor, and direct the changes. Document these and make sure everyone has input into his or her list of expectations. These expectations become a central part of the new job roles.

11. **Accountability**. Monitor the key performance indicators. Provide regular and timely feedback to the team. Recognize that the results of the equipment performance and reliability are direct consequences of how well the people, individually and collectively, are performing their new job roles (new behaviors). Hold people accountable for performing as expected and achieving results. Celebrate, reward, and recognize successes. Learn from mistakes. Never, never punish or blame. Focus on the root cause of performance failure and take corrective action.

12. **Leverage the gains**. Continue to make improvements on the targeted equipment as outlined in the previous eleven steps. When sustainable results can be seen, review the data and begin addressing the next targeted piece of equipment using the same process. Some changes can be quickly "migrated" to other equipment with minimal "team" involvement, but with extensive training focused on the new methods and why they are important.

I continue to be impressed with this "focus on results" approach. It has worked in many different industrial locations on many different types of equipment, both fixed and mobile. One of the biggest problems is the "infectious virus" of the latest-and-greatest improvement initiatives led by uninformed decision makers. ("*Here it comes again, another new maintenance program. I wonder how long this one will last?*") Remember to **focus on results and change the culture along the way**. If it makes business sense and if it makes sense to the people out on the plant floor, on the equipment, it will most likely be sustainable. The fundamentals of equipment reliability are undeniable.

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