

## The future of Maintenance Management

by Joel Levitt

Competence and ignorance go hand in hand. Think about it. Skilled young workers are highly competent in some aspects of the job and ignorant of other aspects. This “out with the old and in with the new” is not a new transition. How many automobile body shop workers can use a hammer and anvil to make a new fender? How many millwrights make their own tools anymore (wasn’t that how all the old timers got started?).

This trend accelerated mightily in the 90’s and into the 2000s. It changed the maintenance skill landscape like the meteor that supposedly made the dinosaurs extinct. A whole bunch of skill requirements changed in a short decade. I think rate of change has slowed down and in the next 20 years we may have the opportunity to have a breather (well not actually a breather – the rate of change has slowed from warp speed to sub-light speed).



Skill sets are being lost. This is a lot like the way species are becoming extinct. In some ways this is natural and has been happening since the beginning of time. Some crafts are already extinct. Others are on their way. The real issue is not to weep for what is lost but rather look very closely at what is really needed to run your plant now and in the future. Successful organizations will be ruthless about training personnel in skill sets deemed essential for the success of the enterprise.

There is a new ingredient to the soup of change. The pressure to cut costs is intense and will get worse (until everyone in China is middle class, which might take a while). When the crunch comes to your industry, if it hasn’t already, you rudely awaken and realize that the lowest cost producer wins the game and you’re not it! The losers will be acquired and brutally stripped to the bone or just plain shuttered.

The problem for us is that cutting out a good maintenance program does save money in the short term. The punch line of the chain saw Al Dunlap joke is that at some point the lack of a good program sets the organization up for a rude fall. The fall is that they can’t support their primary mission due to downtime and quality variability. That mixed with the dwindling critical skill sets means that only the most nimble, smart and light footed will avoid the massacre.

Our mission, should we decide to accept it, is to educate our top management before the brink so that they start to appreciate and support the nuances of a great maintenance program and how it will serve them when the village is global. Our mission is to stop whining about the good old days, get out of our offices and download the mission critical skills from the maintenance masters still around. Finally our mission is to nurture the next generation to become men and women we can be proud of because they will be masters of a world we can’t even imagine and won’t even see.

---

Joel Levitt, Director International Projects JLEVITT@LCE.COM  
Life Cycle Engineering | 4360 Corporate Road Office | Charleston, SC 29405  
843.744.7110  
Mobile +1-267-254-0061  
www.LCE.com

---

---