Have you ever thought about your maintenance department?

By Joel Levitt

What is the mission of the modern maintenance department? There are as many different answers as there are companies. They range from fixing breakdowns to serving the customer. Some firms are intent on reducing downtime and others focus on cost control.

When asked if they are satisfied with their performance they answer no, a resounding no!

When asked what you need to do to improve your performance, the answer is universally "we need to increase preventive, predictive or condition based maintenance." Maintenance professionals feel that problem is that their systems need to be improved, their PM systems need to be sharpened or they need to add more sophisticated predictive technology.

Imagine the reaction of current corporate hero who is no longer a lone product development genus but now a tough cost cutter (who just engineered a 1000 person right sizing effort) when you tell her that you need additional people to carry out the PM system.

There must be something wrong with the mission statement because it conflicts with the new core corporate philosophy of being a lean, mean, fast, in your face competitor.

The old vision of maintenance is as obsolete as a relay rack. The new mission is:

> **"The mission of the maintenance department is to provide excellent support for its customers by reducing and eventually eliminating the need for maintenance services."**

This is radical. Never before has a departments' mission been the elimination of itself. This requires a retooling of traditional roles. Maintenance must merge with machine and tooling design. The lessons of maintenance will be immediately merged into the design profession. While we are at it we should require designers be repair experts before subjecting the world to their designs.

There is an attitude on the part of maintenance that breakdowns are okay. The same attitude supports designs that require constant investment in the form of PM. This acceptance of the status quo is intolerable in production (which should always strive to improve the methods of production) and should be unacceptable in maintenance. A breakdown should be viewed with shame as a failure of the maintenance system. Any equipment that requires periodic attention to avoid breakdowns is likewise a failure of design engineering.

Organizations spend millions of dollars on PM (Preventive Maintenance which includes all predictive technologies). Where does PM fit in to the new order? Do we scrap the hard won advances gained through the judicious use of PM? Simply put PM is a way station on the way to maintenance elimination. When you don't have the time, resources or technology to figure out the real problem you install a PM system to reduce your exposure to breakdown..

PM shifts the mean time between failure to longer periods and higher levels of reliability. The fatal flaw of PM is that it requires constant investment of labor and materials. The mean time between failures will return to its old frequency as soon as the PM investment is stopped.

The implications for the system vendors are dramatic. 98% of the systems sold for maintenance management are garbage in relationship to capabilities in maintenance elimination.

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