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**MAINTENANCE EXCELLENCE WHITE PAPER**  
**Initiating and Sustaining Change within Maintenance**

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A growing number of business and industries in North America today are experiencing a prolonged period of reduced earnings as well as lower profit to earning (p/e) ratios. Sustained positive change is necessary in order to reverse this trend and to cope with the diverse and significant challenges in today's business environment. Indeed, positive change is the foundation of progress. Improvement of production, work methods and processes, and organizational/system structure are essential areas requiring real change, which is capable of driving progress.

*Change (chanj), 1. To make the form, nature, content, future course, etc., of (something) different from what it is or what it would be if left alone. (Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, 1996, Random House)*

Growth alone, without accompanying change, is not progress. Many areas of growth in today's maintenance operations perpetuate practices that are directly responsible for reduced earnings, lower p/e and below-capacity production. Significant investments in growth that yield little or no differences in the form, nature, content or future course of a company have just the opposite effect of progress. For instance, installing a new computerized maintenance management system (CMMS) that automates existing poor work processes, or investing in new manufacturing technology, without including an investment for adequate operator and maintenance training to sustain the new technology, merely adds to the size and cost of the factors already causing lower p/e's and below-capacity production.

**Awareness**

How is change that yields progress initiated? It starts with awareness and education that change is required. "You don't know what you don't know" may be a cliché, but it is one that is profoundly accurate. Attaining the competitive advantage required to meet the challenges we face today certainly requires constant scrutiny of emerging technologies and new thinking, but much of the problem is neither new technology nor new thinking. It is merely lack of understanding of the subtle influences that our current thinking and work processes have on our business. Many executive level managers focus solely on production. Production results are certainly the shortest link to profitability, but such a narrow focus is the downfall of many businesses. Like root cause analysis, everything affecting both production and cost per unit produced must be examined. Successful and profitable businesses understand the value of total integration of all the business functions.



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Maintenance is a production enabler. In other words, maintenance helps to determine what percentage of capacity (full run output) can be produced, which in turn, is utilized by production to define product output level. Reactive maintenance practices cannot yield production levels at desired capacity. Only proactive maintenance, maintenance that prevents failure and preserves operational production assets, can deliver the near-capacity production levels required to sustain our businesses.

All business functions are important. If you have an unimportant business function, it should be discarded immediately. Understanding and embracing the influence each function has on the success of the business and then initiating a well-planned improvement is the first step in making a positive change, one that will reap significant returns. A well conceived, well-planned maintenance improvement initiative that makes the transition from a reactive maintenance style to a proactive maintenance process has been proven through experience to pay back at least 10 times the initial investment in less than three years. Financial investors would not hesitate to commit their own assets to any investment that would yield such a lucrative return.

### **Planning, Implementation**

Following the identification of unsound processes and the decision to initiate change, the implementation process begins with the planning phase. Master planning is their first step in the planning process for successful implementation of a change initiative. While most organizations are very adept at planning their activities, they often fall short on staying the course through completion. Many who have chosen to make the transition from reactive to proactive maintenance have failed to realize the full potential of their efforts. It is wise to obtain contractor or consultant expert services during development of the master plan to ensure the full scope and understanding of all the elements of change are incorporated.

A key ingredient, and one that cannot be over-stressed, in successful implementation of the master plan is support and participation at all levels. Upper management does not usually carry out steps in an action plan; they merely drive it and remove the roadblocks that get in the way and ensure that the plan and its execution are conforming to the company's mission and its short and long-range objectives. Management commitment, or rather the lack of it, is the single most common reason for failure to fully achieve expected results. Only when management is fully committed to the change and to creating the environment to allow and promote change to occur, and dedicated to its successful completion, can the organization succeed in a fully realized implementation of progressive and meaningful change. Leadership is critical and a prerequisite for sustaining change and is often the missing ingredient.

The next element of planning in the planning phase of implementation is the establishment of a steering team to lead the overall change initiative, create the vision



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and to establish the appropriate and essential leadership structure. The steering team should be no more than three to five participants that represent a good cross section of the local management team. Steering team members reconcile the investment and return for the overall initiative and collectively have the authority to make decisions and eliminate any barriers identified during the implementation planning and execution phases.

The execution phase of implementation begins with the steering team's creation and mission definition of multiple focus teams, each assigned with a dedicated team leader, to develop action plans and follow-on execution for each milestone and segment of the master plan. It is human nature, as well as a law of physics, to resist change. Focus teams foster support for change through their participation in the process and they are essential for ground level implementation, which is rudimentary for producing desired results.

Because of their essential role at the grass roots level of implementation, the assignment of focus team leaders should be carefully considered. Ensuring that they have the proper training and coaching as well as a following within the working level employees are key considerations for them to be successful in carrying out their assignments. Focus teams should also be comprised of three to five members in each team and the designated leader is responsible for all team activities. The number of focus teams depends upon the size of the local organization and will heavily influence the duration of the change initiative. Detailed action plans for each element of the master plan will be developed and reviewed with the steering team. When the action plans are approved by the steering team and coordinated/integrated between all focus teams, physical implementation of the plan commences. Action plans must identify a step-by-step process to reach each milestone, then resources assigned (to include all plant personnel) and completion time frames established for each step.

The creation of a support team is an effective way of providing resources to the focus teams on an as-required basis, i.e., external consultants and coaches, vendors, accounting, purchasing, human relations, etc. The steering team will establish regular status review session with the focus teams to monitor progress. The time requirements for steering and focus team participants during implementation planning and execution should be no more than 25% of their time. New focus teams are commissioned as existing ones complete their missions until all elements of the change initiative are fully implemented. A publicly displayed status board of milestone achievement is also a helpful tool in creating awareness and gaining support.

A program manager for change implementation should be designated. This individual can be one of the focus team leaders in small organizations or separate and dedicated individual in larger organizations. For those organizations implemented change at multiple operating sites, assignment of an executive sponsor should be considered to



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ensure participation and input from the corporate entity and to promote standardization between site steering teams.

### **Leadership, Education**

Sustaining change once implementation is completed is again a matter of leadership. When proven work processes are developed and in place, and when systems to automate these work processes are in place, and finally when the payback/rewards have been reaped, real change representing true progress has occurred. Continued leadership and a committed dedication to consistently doing things the new way will sustain the changes themselves and provide for a continuous curve of improvement.