

Leaders in maintenance: A good idea, perhaps? (Part 1)

Mahatma Gandhi was once asked what he thought of Western civilization. He replied that he thought it would be a good idea. The same thought comes to mind when considering management skills in maintenance departments.

**Torbjörn
Idhammar**

Further
information is
available by
contacting
info@idcon.com

Maintenance personnel often become leaders by the touch of “the magic wand.” The wand works in a mysterious way. The wand magically transforms a person who has never held a leadership position into a leader. It converts the person into a leader seamlessly without any training, coaching, job description or direction from peers. Its use usually take place around 5:30 p.m. on Fridays and magically (hence the name) transforms the person to a maintenance leader by 6 a.m. Monday. The wand may be the best maintenance tool on the market!

Examples of magically born leaders are young engineers taking supervisory positions, senior engineers becoming maintenance managers, craftspeople becoming maintenance planners and purchasing people becoming maintenance spare parts managers.

I'll share some thoughts on maintenance leadership, especially for all the people out there who have crossed paths with the wand.

Suggestion No. 1: A leader must first know what to lead toward.

The whole idea of being a leader falls apart if the leader doesn't know what beliefs to lead toward. What is the long-term purpose of reliability and maintenance management in your company, plant, area or department? Hopefully, your company has documented and disseminated beliefs for reliability and maintenance management. If not, the company, plant, area and/or department have set up its leaders to fail.

When asked about the most important thing to know as a leader, former New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani said you must know what you believe in before you start leading others.

If you are a maintenance or plant manager, consider if you have set up a clearly defined “place to go” for your maintenance and reliability efforts. Those who read my last column (see “Plan a clear path to reliability improvements” at www.reliableplant.com) will recognize the suggestion to define “best practices.” IDCON does this work for many organizations and usually divides the checklist into these categories:

- Maintenance leadership and organization
- Preventive maintenance
- Planning and scheduling
- Spare parts management
- Root cause problem elimination
- Engineering's interface with maintenance
- Technical database
- Skills improvement for hourly and management
- Facilities, tools and workshops

You may want to consider using this categorization as a start for your list. The idea is to make a checklist within each category that is very clear to the organization. In the PM section, you may state “we will store lubricants properly”; or, in spare parts management, “we'll have an inventory record accuracy of 95 percent or higher.”

Regardless if you are a corporate manager, plant manager, maintenance manager,

planner or a supervisor, ask yourself if you have a set of beliefs to lead toward. If not, I suggest you make a list together with your organization.

Suggestion No. 2: Understand the role of a maintenance leader.

Many people believe the role of a maintenance leader is to tell other people what to do. I think this is wrong. Other people feel the role of a maintenance leader is to motivate and encourage other people. I think this is somewhat misguided, as well. Let me explain.

The role of a maintenance leader is simply to get other people to do what you want them to do. Encouragement, motivation, group decisions and much more are tools that steer people in the right direction. But at the end of the day, a leader is trying to make other people do what he or she wants them to do. Again, if a leader is successful, we hope the company he/she works for has defined in simple terms where to lead.

How can maintenance leaders make people do what they want them to do? I think this is an art few master, but many can improve on. I'll continue this topic in the next issue, starting with some thoughts around making people do what we want them to do.