

Maintenance leadership, Part 4

**Torbjörn
Idhammar**

In parts 1, 2 and 3 of this column series, I outlined the need for developing maintenance leadership (visit the *Reliable Plant* Web site at www.reliableplant.com to read these articles). This column is the fourth and final part of the series.

Further information is available by contacting info@idcon.com

I previously explained the system and procedures that need to be set up in order to make people do what you want them to do. Since people can't be more effective than the system in which they work, you have to start by building a system and procedures. However, if you as maintenance leaders are going to get people to do what you want them to do, you are going to have to use diplomacy and psychology.

Consider the following situation: You are sitting down at home after a long day of work to read the newspaper. Your wife storms into the room and shrieks, "Get off of the couch! Start vacuuming, now! We have guests coming in two hours!" What would your reaction be? How would you feel? Would you cheerfully jump off the couch and start vacuuming while humming James Blunt's latest hit, "You're Beautiful"?

Is that a realistic response? I don't think so. Your wife did not do a very good job of getting you to do what she wanted you to do, did she? In this case, she was not a good leader. (Yes, the wife is the leader at home, if anyone had a doubt.)

Instead, let's say your wife came into the front room and said, "Dear husband, I have a problem. Could you help little me with my problem?" (I know that's laying it on thick, but you get the point.) Since you are a macho man, you undoubtedly will say, "Of course. How can I help you with your little problem?" She says, "I need to clean, pick up the kids, cook a nice dinner and set the table within two hours, but there is not enough time. What should I do?"

Oh, yes, she got your number, but in a nice way. When you manage and lead people, it matters how you talk to them. Apply the same principle in the plant if you aren't doing so already and you will see improvements in getting people to do what you want them to do, which is the essence of leadership.

People are not your most valuable resource

We are told all the time that people are our most valuable resource. This can't be true. When I visit plants all over the world, I always get the same story. The plants tell me that they could send 10 to 30 percent of their maintenance department home and it would not make a difference the next day.

The reason is that 10 to 30 percent of the people never do anything useful. The cold, honest truth is that people are NOT the most valuable resource; the RIGHT people are your most valuable resource.

It is, therefore, as Jim Collins mentions in his book "Good to Great," utterly and completely vital for any plant to "get the right people on the bus." If you have a weak maintenance manager, supervisor, operations coordinator, planner, you name it, you will not be successful in your efforts to improve reliability.

Plant managers have to deal with poor performance. If they don't, they will risk their own job because the same is true for a corporate vice president.

Bringing it all together

Summarizing this four-article series on plant leadership, improving plant reliability to the point of perfection is a long journey with many milestones. But, in my opinion, plant reliability and any other improvement efforts must start with the following:

- 1) Get the right people in the right spots.
- 2) Create a clear vision for the plant to strive for (best practices).
- 3) Managers must be leaders, not just managers.
- 4) Leadership must create a work system that allows people to be effective.

Looking ahead

I often get questions about best practices? “What are they?” And, “how do I get them?” As a result of your interest in this area, please read the next issue of *Reliable Plant*, where I will start a column series on “reliability and maintenance best practices.”

During this series, I will describe best practices and also provide a self-audit format for each article.

As always, if you have any questions about these or other maintenance management-related topics, contact me. I'd love to hear from you.