

The Power of Relationships

for
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Date of publication: Mar 29, 2021 and available online at:
<https://theramreview.com/the-power-of-relationships/>



If asked where a maintenance-improvement program should focus its initial efforts within your organization, how would you respond? If you answer, “understand and improve our stakeholder and partner relationships,” you have truly grasped the holistic, or universal key to unlocking continuous-improvement success.

In her book, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in A Chaotic World*, renowned management expert Margaret Wheatley wrote, “In organizations, real power and energy is generated through relationships. This pattern of relationships and the capacities to form them are more important than tasks, functions, roles and positions.”

For any maintenance group to successfully deliver asset availability and reliability in a ramped-up, post COVID-19 working environment, it must begin to map out a relationship model on three levels. Level 1 explores the intra-departmental relationships between management, maintainers (trades), planners, schedulers, storeroom personnel, and clerical staff. Level 2 explores inter-departmental relationships between operators, production supervisors, production planners, engineers, purchasers, accounts, HR personnel, management, and contractors. Level 3, which, arguably, is the most important, explores how maintenance personnel establish relationships with their maintainable assets. For more information, refer to “Sharing Trade Secrets” at the following link.

[Click Here To Read The Jan. 10, 2021, Article “Sharing Trade Secrets”](#)

Building these vital relationships starts with an understanding of what you manage, versus what you control. For example, a maintenance department is responsible for managing all asset repairs, but it is not always able to control access to the equipment (*due to operator, production planner, production scheduler, production manager*); control access to parts (*due to purchaser, vendors*); control access to funds (*due to accounting, management*); or control access to specialized trades (*due to contractors*). Instead, maintenance must rely on multiple mutual working relationships with those others to deliver its maintenance mandate.

In any relationship, both sides have different needs and must work together to establish, document, and develop areas in which cooperation is required. Forging a mutual agreement to prioritize actions based on the consequences of ignoring those needs, must be based on facts and not assumptions.

Similarly, working with machine operators, maintainers must review the often-intimate relationship formed with the asset. B.F. Skinner, in his 1969 book, *Contingencies of Reinforcement*, stated, “The real problem is not whether machines think, but whether men do.” In a Reliability Centered Maintenance (RCM) approach, we are taught to understand each piece of equipment from an up-close and personal perspective. That includes understanding a machine’s idiosyncratic nature within its operating context and understanding the how and consequence of each possible failure.

Access to predictive technology affords maintenance an easy, yet in-depth look into a machine’s health (through oil analysis, infrared thermography, vibration analysis, ultrasonics, and historical-failure data). Ultimately, though, we must do the thinking for the machine and work collaboratively with peers, management, and vendors to ensure

we meet its needs, in a timely manner, while simultaneously meeting the needs of the maintenance department and its relationship partners.

Forming, mapping, and understanding relationships allows all sides to state their own points of view, and teaches us to not make assumptions on each other's behalf. Measuring and tracking what each relationship partner controls also allows us to objectively define how/where the partnership must work to better manage and resolve issues outside their respective areas of control.

Most of us know that relationship-building is important in life. It's also critical to successful delivery of any asset-management program, and key to meeting the needs of ever-changing industrial environments.

About the Author

Ken Bannister has 40+ years of experience in the RAM industry. For the past 30, he's been a Managing Partner and Principal Asset Management Consultant with Engtech industries Inc., where he has specialized in helping clients implement best-practice asset-management programs worldwide. A founding member and past director of the Plant Engineering and Maintenance Association of Canada, he is the author of several books, including three on lubrication, one on predictive maintenance, and one on energy reduction strategies, and is currently writing one on planning and scheduling. Contact him directly at 519-469-9173 or kbannister@theramreview.com.