

Management's Role in Maintenance Error Prevention



As a maintenance manager, you have to do your best to communicate with the owners or executive management to ensure you have the resources and the time to complete the assigned tasks. Management's role is not only to provide cost-efficient maintenance without any waste and with maximum production, also to examine what actions we endorse and what actions we want others to emulate.

Reviewing the outcomes of some of the "classic" accidents involving maintenance shows that the maintenance manager, quality assurance manager, etc. were relieved of their duties because the company could not afford the culture and attitude they had fostered. This usually results from trying to make do and not giving the owners and executives a realistic picture of what is required to provide good maintenance from the very start. These managers then get caught in the vicious trap of trying to do more and more with less.

Communications with senior management or executives can be challenging for many lower level managers. How many of us are effective at telling our boss something they really do not want to hear, although we know they must hear it?

Managers have to rely on their personal experiences, education, and training as well as their peers and subordinates to determine what needs to be done to improve an organization. But, is there an effective channel of communications to senior management? What can be done to improve the level of communication to the senior management regarding changes that are needed to be a successful organization? Do we have the training, tools, resources, policies, open lines of communication to foster the continuous improvement that is needed to survive in a highly competitive environment?

If we communicate openly and honestly, we will gain the respect of the rest of the organization. This in turn dictates the attitude, morale, culture, and level of communications in an organization.

Setting the standard

As managers, we have to set the standard, and our attitudes will be mimicked throughout the organization. One senior manager told me that he asks his employees, "Tell me what I need to hear not what I want to hear."

Are we endorsing a positive environment where we are looking for the good in the individuals and the quality of the work that is being completed? Or, are we always looking for and reinforcing the negative in both the individuals and their work? The role of managers is to set the standards, communicate the standards and enforce them. We have to bring out the best in people and be prepared to listen.

Hiring Quality

I see more companies spending time trying to assess the attitude of the potential employee before they are hired. As managers we have to examine the quality of people we hire. Many companies realize that "one bad apple in the barrel" can spoil all of them quickly.

Managers have to make an effort to communicate with their employees. We may have forgotten what it was like being on the shop floor relying on rumors to find out what the future holds. Failing to communicate effectively in the work place is directly linked with an increase in lack of co-operation, poor-quality work, low productivity, tension, gossip, rumors, increased turnover, absenteeism, and tardiness. When we do communicate, we should focus on the positive and acknowledge when a good job was done. When was the last time you said 'great job' or even 'thank you'? What effect would this have on each employee's self esteem?

As mentioned earlier, when we read through accident reports or hear of an accident in the news, one of the repercussions of the accident is either a management shuffle or the managers responsible for the maintenance department are dismissed from the company. Unfortunately, it seems the easiest way to change the attitude fostered by a manager is to bring in new blood.

Are we doing the best we can for the company as managers by providing an effective maintenance department, and for the technicians by providing them a stress-free and interactive maintenance department?

Today's news provides evidence that maintenance managers are not communicating effectively with technicians; thus, managers are not doing their best to ensure quality is No. 1., as reflected in a quote in the article "Alaska Airlines' Maintenance Probed" from the March 18, 2000 issue of *USAToday*, "...the airline says it has put a top manager on leave while it investigates claims by 64 Seattle mechanics that they were 'pressured, threatened and intimidated' to cut corners on repairs."

Was this an acute inability to communicate effectively or was it a more deep-rooted problem with the very culture of the organization?

When will human factor awareness training be brought into organizations for all concerned to take the training and take heed to it? Or, do we need more regulations and policies to ensure that we do act as professionals - I hope not!

About the author:

Richard Komarniski is President of Grey Owl Aviation Consultants. He has worked as an Aircraft Maintenance Technician for the last twenty-six years holding AME and A&P Ratings. Richard has been providing Human Factors Training to various aviation maintenance departments. For information on Human Factors training or assistance in setting up a MRM Program contact Grey Owl Aviation Consultants, Box 233, Onanole, Manitoba ROJ 1N0 Canada, telephone (204) 848-7353, or fax (204) 848-4605, www.greyowl.com or richard@greyowl.com.