

Empowered Supervisors Enable Facility Management Success

BY JOHN MALIFF

Facilities engineering management success is judged by what happens onsite day in and day out. Whether you use an outsourced service provider or handle maintenance in-house, the issues are essentially the same and the results need to be outstanding. At minimum you have to constantly ask yourself a couple of questions: Are service goals being met? Is the customer satisfied?

Some companies create massive infrastructures to measure and report on all kinds of metrics to answer these two questions. Certainly there is a need for measurement and certainly there is a place for technology to help measure. Yet, the fundamental quality that enables companies to meet their customer and service goals is leadership. Leadership fosters success because it directly influences what happens onsite. Specifically, I'm talking about the leadership provided by the onsite manager or the project manager.

At UNICCO, we have 20,000 people. Most are supervisors and workers at customer locations so, understandably, we've given a lot of thought to onsite management and how to make sure we follow the most effective methodology at our customer sites. We are constantly challenged because often our contract terms and conditions stipulate continuous improvement along a series of metrics. We're also challenged because the customer outsources under the presumption that we're going to do it better and produce measurable results.

We have found that workforce empowerment is the key. If our supervisors are empowered, and create self-directed work teams that reach their entire staffs including the skilled maintenance people, we end up with better results and outstanding customer service.

Empowerment is a nice buzzword but there's much more to it than meets the eye. First of all, it's got to be more than a buzzword — it has to be the corporate culture. If you give it lip service everyone will know. If you don't practice it at the higher levels, it will not survive the trip down through the hierarchy. There are a few specific criteria that must be met before empowerment can happen, including:

- Attitude
- Training
- Authority
- Methodology

THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

Since we've established that supervisors are key to the whole process, it's important that they have the right attitude and disposition to empower self-directed work teams. It's best to nurture this from the start. It's easier to develop it in your own employees; to promote frontline workers who take initiative and who are natural leaders. An employee who teaches and informally develops others on the job is a good candidate.

When you do have to turn to the outside to hire a supervisor it is much more difficult to identify these natural tendencies. Yet, somehow, through the screening process, through referrals or some other means, it's important to find and

recruit supervisors who fundamentally believe in empowering their people every day.

TRAINING

Yet, attitude only goes so far. Supervisors have to be given the tools to empower their staff. It's important that specialized training be provided. Since it is our core business, at UNICCO we have regularly scheduled courses for site managers to train them on the corporate culture and staff management techniques.

For on-staff supervisors who work directly for commercial, industrial or manufacturing companies, finding maintenance management training may be more of a challenge. Corporate training programs generally do not offer customized courses for plant maintenance supervisors and managers. There are outside plant maintenance courses available, such as those offered by the AFE leading to the Certified Plant Engineer (CPE) or Certified Plant Maintenance Manager (CPMM) accreditation. These courses, coupled with the right general management courses, could give a good general overview. However, if staff empowerment is your goal, you'll have to find some specific courses on empowerment.

So, what should your supervisors be learning? First of all they should be getting the message that the corporate culture considers empowerment to be an effective management approach. Then they should be trained in a methodology that teaches them to work with their customers' management and their staff. They should be given the tools to confidently identify and implement frontline procedures that facilitate continuous improvement onsite.

As a result of the training, each site manager has the tools to design a specific set of metrics for each account that includes measures of customer satisfaction, safety, quality, labor rates, overhead ratios, new business growth, and other criteria.

Then, when they return onsite, supervisors need to be able to bring the message to their staffs. But they should not be left alone. They should be supported by on-site resources. Facilities services and maintenance contractors, my company included, often assign staff onsite to handle training, safety and quality management at the local level. This is part of the overall contract and helps both the customer and contractor by managing and reporting on these issues. Depending on the size of the account, all three responsibilities may be carried by a single person. For in-house managers there may be corporate resources that deal with safety and quality however, as mentioned above, training may be a special challenge.

AUTHORITY REQUIRES AUTONOMY

Giving supervisors the authority is the next step in the process. Once you've promoted or recruited supervisors who have the right attitude and trained them, it's necessary to give them real authority to make decisions. This is difficult to do in reality. Giving authority doesn't mean walking away from the supervisor or the account — it does mean giving autonomy and allowing decisions to be made based on local information, relationships

and understandings of the onsite situation. Will mistakes be made? Absolutely! Will they be catastrophic? Probably not if you have the right, well-trained person in place. This is the test of upper management to see if they have truly bought into the concept of empowerment.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Now we have the right person in place, he's well-trained and we've given him the authority to act. What's he do now? There's more than one approach to workforce empowerment. The important thing is to pick a methodology, train to it and implement it across the board. At UNICCO, we have chosen to use a variation of the Japanese Kaisan (which means constant improvement) methodology. It's used to identify major areas that need improvement, analyze why the problem exists, and develop solutions.

In practice, the site manager, working with the customer's plant management and perhaps a technical expert from his staff, identifies 10 of the biggest problem areas. Together they rank the issues. The ranking may be based on cost/potential savings, desired process improvements, environmental concerns, or other corporate issues, such as plant renovations or relocation. It is critical that the customer and the site manager are clear, not only on the priorities, but also on the process that will be followed.

Once the list is developed, the site manager and the customer prioritize the list to determine which will be attacked first. They may decide to go after five of 10 and hold the other issues until one of the first set is resolved. The site manager then creates a few self-directed continuous improvement task teams that are charged with analyzing each of the specific prob-

lem areas, determining a single solution or a set of recommendations, determining how to implement the solution and actually doing the work. Each team selects its own leader and establishes goals that support the overall objective.

Teams, generally consisting of six to eight members, should include the craftspeople who work in the problem area day in and day out. Depending on the issue, some other trades, perhaps a machine operator, someone from gauges and tools, power distribution, environmental, or materials handling may be represented, as well as a subcontractor or customer representative. The guiding principle is to gather together the skills that are necessary to fully analyze the problem and propose the solution. Team members may serve on more than one continuous improvement task team at a time depending on the demand for their skills.

Where does the site manager fit into this? He manages. It is up to the site manager to balance the time commitment of the Kaisan teams against the day-to-day demands of the job. In our scenario, the site manager does not get directly involved in self-directed task team activities. The team is charged with finding the solution.

Once established, the teams look at all aspects of the problem. We use the FADE (focus, analyze, develop and execute) method which brings a considerable level of discipline to the process. The research may include machine histories, preventive maintenance logs, production logs, new equipment options — even operator skill level, training and other “soft” issues. Of course, this requires good baseline information. It's important to have the data collection processes and technologies in place so the team doesn't waste time on the collection and organization of pertinent information. This

baseline information also makes it easier to project cost savings, as well as process and quality improvements. Also, when the project is implemented, it's easier to measure actual results.

When the team finds the solution, they present it to the site manager and then the customer. Additional issues that range beyond strict maintenance, such as capital investments or work rule changes, are presented and, if approved, worked into the solution. Then the continuous improvement task team is charged with implementing the changes. The metrics that are in place are then used to measure the results to ensure that the problem was, in fact, solved and the desired result was achieved.

Once the first issue is settled, the next problem area identified during the Kaisan process is moved up into active status and a task team is assigned. This way, the top five or 10 most pressing problems receive an organized, sustained response that leads to a solution.

CONCLUSION

Well-trained supervisors who have the right attitude are key to our approach to self-directed, continuous improvement teams. This approach creates an esprit de corps and willingness to develop creative approaches to problems that create a new level of customer service. Through these teams we are able to involve virtually all of our staff, which actually lessens the management burden of our onsite managers.

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Example of Task Team Work

A large food processing company used over 1,000 pumps in its production process. Due to planned maintenance and emergency repairs about 100 pumps were out of commission at any given time. This required a fairly sophisticated spare pump inventory and repair tracking process in order to ensure the onsite availability of required pumps at all times.

The company used an outside vendor for pump rebuild/repair. It was happy with the service and did not have any significant availability or quality issues. However, company management was not sure that it was handling repairs in the most cost-effective manner.

The company turned to UNICCO to evaluate the process to determine if there was a better way of doing things. We pulled together a task team consisting of a lead mechanic, a maintenance and repair operation store employee, a purchasing agent and a planner/scheduler. The team looked at a range of issues including the frequency of failures, where the failures were coming from, the types of failures, what was involved in repair, repair cost, time to repair, and repair parts and inventory tracking.

After analyzing all of these issues to understand the current situation, the team

began looking at alternatives. One of the considerations was to determine how the overall pump rebuild and repair process would be affected by eliminating off-site service and keeping it onsite.

The team then analyzed how each of the issues would be affected by the change. But, in addition to looking simply at the onsite vs. outsourced process, they projected other important startup issues, including staffing, training, and buying tools and equipment. Then they made some projections on timeliness and quality. The result was a comprehensive comparison of not only ongoing operations costs, process and quality issues, but good insight into the startup costs, training and transition issues.

Ultimately, based on a full review and the consideration of quality, cost, timeliness and the other important considerations, the recommendation to management was to bring the pump repair onsite using UNICCO staff. The task team's recommendation was implemented. The result was a yearly savings of between \$300,000 and \$400,000 with a reduction in average handling and repair time from about three weeks to 10 days, with the same levels of quality.