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Six ways proactive plant managers drive success

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A plant manager's job is one that presents a great deal of challenges on a daily basis. The vitality of an entire facility — if not the entire company — is dependent upon their every decision. There are six ways plant managers are able to avoid failed plants that have direct correlations to large-scale machinery malfunctions or unplanned downtime. By proactively taking these steps, the difference between success and failure of a facility's maintenance department is made.

1. Employ more than one expert on staff. Plant managers often make the decision to utilize only one person for the predictive maintenance role who will many times also carry other responsibilities. This person may only have limited experience in one or two technologies. Problems arise when this single individual gets sick, retires, takes vacation or has family emergencies. A plant manager must recognize the risk of one person's ability to derail a plant's entire maintenance program.

2. Utilize experts available through outsourcing. It is commonly thought by plant personnel if an organization's executive team makes the decision to outsource specific maintenance or production functions to a vendor, in-house jobs will be put at risk. This misconception often leads plant managers to assign maintenance workers to roles they are not properly trained or prepared for. Many managers are under the impression that taking first or second level certification courses are all that is necessary but that is only setting facility staff and a plant up for failure. It is critical to be aware of technologies available through outsourcing professionals that will keep maintenance departments functioning at top performance.

3. Do not allow employee skill stagnation. It is becoming clear proper training of maintenance personnel is lacking in many plants. Plant managers need to look at the "big picture" and devote time and capital resources to fight against the skills gap. This preventive measure helps employees attain high-end skillsets that help keep sites running smoothly. Without training, people are given job responsibilities they are ill suited for because they lack baseline skill sets.

4. Be sure to avoid the "check box" mentality; it hurts more than it helps. Plant managers often get what they pay for. This is doubly true when managers invest in low-grade solutions to satisfy initiatives led by executives. There are two problems with this mindset: The first is inadequate

tools will provide you with poor results and the second is this "low-cost" mentality is also likely to filter down throughout the staff and further dilute the results of the project. Plant managers should embrace new initiatives as opportunities to improve their site, commit to understanding the expected result and implement a solution that delivers exactly what they need as opposed to just checking the box.

5. Develop a dialogue with executives. Establishing an open relationship with C-suite executives is one of the most important, yet overlooked, obligations a plant manager has. Plant managers who shy away from sharing important maintenance information are quickly identified and chastised when operations are in a downturn. Rather than worrying about "airing their dirty laundry," managers

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should view this transparency as a means to showcase the value of their leadership to the overall business. It is only for their benefit to observe and follow the same principles of successful plant managers to ensure continued success and clear communication with upper management.

6. Share information with peers. Along with shying away from sharing information with upper management, plant managers are sometimes unlikely to share best practices with colleagues. Through this behavior, individuals fail to realize the leadership capabilities and positions for success they are missing out on. When data and best practices are shared amongst others in similar situations, collaborative processes are able to be put to work and additional opportunities for success and growth will arise. This principle is especially important when executives choose to start up new programs.

At the end of the day, plant managers have all the tools needed to run maintenance departments that are free of frequent, unplanned and costly downtime. It is solely in their hands to ensure the success of not only their department but their careers as well.

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