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PROACTIVE

REACTIVE

by John Crossan

Do We Really Want to Be **PROACTIVE?**

(Part 1)

As we struggle to move from reactive to proactive maintenance, maybe at some point we just need to stop and ask ourselves the basic question:

"Do we really want to be proactive in maintenance? Really? Honestly?"

BRIEFLY RESTATING THE DIFFERENCE:

REACTIVE MAINTENANCE is dealing with loss issues due to equipment malfunction that show up unexpectedly and repairs have to be done immediately, on a crisis basis, in a very inefficient, unplanned, unscheduled way.

PROACTIVE MAINTENANCE is monitoring equipment for signs of deterioration and performing the necessary repairs and adjustments, when needed, in an efficient, planned, scheduled way, before a loss issue actually happens.

Who wouldn't want to operate in the Proactive Mode?

Unless, maybe, you feel reactive behavior is actually useful in some ways?

One way would be

Managers Using Crises As A Way To Keep Organizations Energized...

Organizations and people seem to naturally get complacent over time. We fall into ruts in performance and behavior where we don't like to push ourselves outside of the routine.

Procrastination seems to be a natural human tendency. "Why do something that will take some different kind of effort today?" Something that might lead to issues we haven't had to deal with before. Something that might be difficult and stressful.

We don't want to disrupt an environment that feels comfortable and safe.

So the status quo just gets stronger and stronger, and we feel more and more powerless and incapable of changing it.

We drift into the "Just Show Up Every Day" mode then wonder why we're bored, feel insignificant and don't seem to get much satisfaction from our work.

Visiting plants, it's evident how purposeful, or not, people seem to be in their overall manner. Do they look and talk like they value their time and their contribution? Do they look and talk like they feel someone else values their contributions?

Or does it seem like there's just nothing of any immediate importance or concern? "Lack of a sense of urgency" is the term we use most often.

A few years back, a friend was very excited when he joined a large, well-known technical organization, but then left after barely a year, disappointed with the inertia of so many there who refused to, or just couldn't, change their thinking and processes. And the company was just gradually fading.

So, it's a manager's job to keep an organization energized. To keep everyone moving onward and upward out of the ruts. To maintain that sense of urgency. To build a culture where people are concerned when things are just not happening the way they should be, or could be, and they go ahead and systematically do something about it.

Energizing an organization is not an easy thing to do and crises, real or fabricated, and a push for immediate fixes are one way to do this.

A popular saying a few years back was: "A crisis is a terrible thing to waste."

Forcing the organization out of its routine behavior to deal with the crisis. Pushing people out of their comfort zones to do things, right now, that weren't in their plans for the day. It's a way to emphasize the importance of dealing with problem issues. Of getting the needed improvements made. It breaks us out of the ruts. Out of the "business as usual" attitude.

And we've grown used to quicker being better. We've found ways to eliminate non-value adding operations and the time they take. Order Processing Times, Changeover Times, Product Development and Introduction Times, etc., have all dropped dramatically over the last decades.

We are not patient in our customer service expectations. "We hate to wait."

It just feels better when something gets done right away.

Military history, which we love to apply to industry, has examples of brilliant commanders who won by acting quickly and unexpectedly. (But many more who lost by being too slow.)

And we all know from our own experience that if something isn't acted on fairly quickly, the chances of it actually getting done fall off rapidly as time passes. Other issues come along and this one gets pushed back or forgotten.

So, pushing an organization to act quickly is absolutely the right thing to do. (Most of the time.)

But it has to be done correctly, otherwise it can make it harder to get an organization to act proactively. Harder to take the time to "Do it right."

It gives the impression that we always need immediate action, regardless of the issue.

The proactive process takes work and it takes time, and we're constantly told we have to eliminate both to be efficient.

We're coached that issues should only surface once and be dealt with decisively, immediately and completely.

I've sat in daily production meetings and listened to intense questioning on how fast current issues can be fixed, with not much emphasis on taking time and focusing efforts to understand the issue and correcting the underlying process deficiency that caused it to occur.

And there's usually little interest in reviewing yesterday's issues. What was found? And what preventive measures might be put in place to prevent the issue from recurring?

Fixing today's crises preempts everything else (and again crises that probably wouldn't have even happened if basic proactive processes were in place).

It's difficult to build a proactive culture when people feel they must always completely deal

To build a culture where people are concerned when things are not happening the way they should be, or could be, and they go ahead and systematically do something about it.



PROACTIVE

with issues immediately, or face criticism and embarrassment in meetings, or perhaps worse. It can also become a competitive forum for the politically ambitious to display their ability to get their repairs dealt with quickly by diverting the most valuable resources, whether warranted or not.

Back to the military, George Armstrong Custer probably would say he wished he'd taken a little more time to better assess the situation.

While this affects all plant processes, particular damage can be done to the Maintenance System Processes. Things that typically happen in the crisis repair mode, even if the issue has already been mitigated (as they usually are), include:

- **We bypass the maintenance planning and scheduling process** that would get the repair done effectively and efficiently, normally at the earliest on next week's schedule, but based on its priority in the overall plant scheme of things.

We jump in and try to make the complete fix when we don't exactly know what the problem is and whether we have what we need to fix it.

And we disrupt the other work and the personnel we had scheduled, which perhaps means giving up some hard to come by downtime opportunities.

But to some, a maintenance work management system is just administrative bureaucracy. We should be able to get it done right now, or something is wrong. And the planning role is just a misuse of a good technician who could otherwise be making repairs.

So, now we're wasting our limited maintenance resources.

- **We pull maintenance technicians away from performing preventive maintenance (PM) inspections** to deal with the issue. This obviously would seem to be the right thing, as inspections really don't need to be done immediately.

The problem, then, becomes that we never seem to be able find that right time to do them.

So, now we're doomed to dealing with even more surprise crises.

- **We use our "Best" individuals.** Pull them away from whatever they're working on to deal with the crisis. Bypass the less developed individuals who could be learning from this. That would just slow things down.

Also, as our mechanics are usually our best technical troubleshooters, so best to use them to solve operational issues, rather than waste time developing the operators.

Of course, you will always have to make some immediate crisis repairs, so you have to have that capability developed, but you need to recognize that immediate repair is a very ineffective, inefficient activity.

So, we're wasting developmental opportunities that will increase our resources.

- **We add to our Parts Inventory.** If we don't have the part in stock, then immediately add it to the in-house stocked items list. So we can fix it quicker next time. (And now we just accepted that it will happen again.)

Even though we may have previously made the decision not to stock it, as we can get it pretty quickly from a vendor anytime we need it.

So, we're again wasting valuable resources.

- **When we've made the repair, it's done.** It's over. It's fixed.

So, what's the point of taking time for a follow-up review of what happened?

Probably not even time to document the issue and what we did.

On to the next.

No discussion of what can be done to prevent it from recurring. So, history will undoubtedly repeat itself. And again, we're wasting a capability development step.

Of course, we will always have to make some immediate crisis repairs and we have to have that capability developed, but we need to recognize that immediate repair is a very ineffective, inefficient activity.

The numbers usually quoted are that emergency or generally unplanned maintenance work:

- Costs four to 10 times more than planned work;
- Takes four times longer;
- Is usually not the best solution (Not the way we would do it if we had time to think about it and get organized.);
- Usually needs to be redone.

This just eats up our resources. We will never have enough people, parts, or money. And worse, we're hurting our overall reliability.

Demanding immediate action is an effective way to disrupt the organization, but not always the right approach. People know what is really a

crisis and what isn't, and managers lose credibility when they make every issue a crisis.

The work just never gets done really well or efficiently. The issues don't get fixed permanently. Processes are not improved. There is never time for learning. And people get discouraged and burn out.

We prefer hyperactivity to lethargy, but neither is good.

The best, most effective managers, I worked with, over the years, were the ones who always seemed to know about every production issue, every quality issue, every safety issue, every personnel issue, as well as every other issue in the place, and they were concerned about them and communicated their concern.

But, they also acted, and expected, and constantly coached, others to act in an appropriate and balanced way. Fostering the proactive approach and processes.

Not insisting that permanent repairs must be done right now, but emphatic that they be dealt with correctly; that the maintenance process gets them scheduled, done and not forgotten.

And, there was never any excuse for ignoring a problem situation.

Part 2 of this article addresses:

How Do We Do Both?

- Deal effectively with issues in a proactive way;
- Keep the organization energized.



John Crossan consults in manufacturing and maintenance improvement. He spent 40 plus years with major companies in operations and engineering. For much of the last 14 years of this, he mainly focused on improving operations by fostering the installation and ongoing implementation of basic manufacturing and maintenance processes, incorporating lean concepts, across some 30 varied plants in the U.S. and Canada.



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